



THE BOYNTON  
NEIGHBORHOOD

BY FAYE HUNTINGTON

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CAMP WINCHELL.

# THE BOYNTON NEIGHBORHOOD

BY  
FAYE HUNTINGTON

*Author of "A Modern Exodus," "St. Paul's Problem," "A Baker's  
Dozen," "Those Boys"*

"The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the  
simple"

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BOSTON AND CHICAGO

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## INTRODUCTION.

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THE BOYNTON NEIGHBORHOOD is more than a story. It does not lack in interest as fiction, but the charm of the narrative is as little to be considered as the fine setting of a diamond. The diamond deserves the finest of settings, and care should be taken to secure it, but after the gem is placed it is the brilliant and not the gold around it which calls forth admiration. This story is but the setting of a splendid idea, which must captivate every earnest disciple of Christ who reads the book. The religious problem of the country precinct or town has often been discussed. THE BOYNTON NEIGHBORHOOD shows how it can be solved. The situation it sketches at the opening has its counterpart in many localities. In such places church services, Sunday-schools, neighborhood classes, and other experiments have failed. Here is something simple and inexpensive which has succeeded — for though this is a story yet it stands for actual facts. What is here told is substantially true of many veritable places. The organization of a Home Class, the members of which are pledged to nothing more than the study of the current Sunday-school lesson in connection with some Sabbath-school for a half-hour each week, has been proven to be in numberless instances entirely feasible, and often has led to remarkable results. The practicability of the plan is made to appear by the author so clearly and so attractively

that the reading of the book must result in stimulating a great many to enact the rôle of Miss Harper. And if it should do so, the author can have no better reward.

W. A. DUNCAN.

BOSTON, March, 1895.

# THE BOYNTON NEIGHBORHOOD.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE BOYNTONS.

THE Boynton Neighborhood takes its name from an early settler. The Boynton farm had been in the family for three generations ; and now, after an absence of several years, Mr. Samuel Boynton returned to take the personal oversight of the estate which had fallen to him upon the death of his father. Because of his long absence he was quite a stranger in the home of his boyhood, while to his wife, life in that remote country place was quite a new experience.

It was Sunday afternoon in early summer. They had that morning driven four miles to the nearest church ; they had joined in the praises and in the prayers ; had listened to the faithful presentation of the Word and had spent an hour in Sunday-school. They had met and returned the warm hand-grasp of the pastor ; had exchanged cordial greetings with the brethren, and during the long homeward ride had, in no spirit of

criticism, exchanged views upon the sermon and the affairs of the church. By three o'clock they had finished their Sunday dinner, and while Mr. Boynton watered the horses his wife got the table and the dishes out of the way and they were ready for their quiet home hour.

The view from the front porch where they were sitting was a fine one, with its breadth of meadow and pasture and the woodland beyond, with, away back, the blue line of the distant hill range. But of late the Boyntons had not enjoyed their Sunday afternoons upon the porch. In full view a game of baseball was going on, and to these Sabbath-loving people it was not a pleasant accompaniment to their reading and conversation.

"Things did not use to be so," remarked Mr. Boynton. "I remember very well when all the families between here and the Middle Road were regular churchgoers, and when there was a Sunday evening prayer meeting in the school-house and sometimes a neighborhood prayer meeting during the week; and no set of boys would have dared to play ball—even to toss one in the back yard, let alone going out in full view of all the community for a regular match! And I

presume there is betting going on added to the Sabbath breaking!"

"And do you know, I believe that is Freddie Loomis sitting on the fence watching the game!" said Mrs. Boynton.

"I think it quite likely. There are a number of small boys down there under the maples."

"I wish we might do something for the people of this vicinity. It seems almost a heathen country. I do believe that there are men and women here who know as little about the Bible and Christianity as do the Hottentots."

"I think you are right," returned Mr. Boynton. "The last time I was in the village I was talking to Mr. Prentice about matters out here. He says every effort has been made to get the people to attend church and Sunday-school; but they have failed in every instance. Occasionally a boy will go to Sunday-school for a few times, especially about Christmas or just before the annual picnic; but it seems impossible, so Mr. Prentice looks upon it, to get a hold upon them. They tried a Sunday-school in the schoolhouse one summer, but it did not flourish and died out before cold weather."

"Y-e-s" — Mrs. Boynton uttered the monosyllable musingly and then in a few moments

remarked: "Those tomato plants I brought from Mr. Brown's the other day are all wilted and dead."

Mr. Boynton looked at his wife in surprise. He had supposed she was deeply interested in the condition of the people of the neighborhood and that she was puzzling over plans to help them, and here she was branching off into a talk about tomato plants. But looking into her face he saw that she was still thinking about the people.

"What was the matter?" he asked, desiring to draw out her thought.

"For one thing, the soil out here on the hill is different. Plants grown in that low mucky ground seem vigorous, but they do not bear transplanting into our dryer and lighter soil. But I think the principal cause of failure was that I did not water them sufficiently. I was busy about other things and neglected them. And I imagine that a good many of our enterprises fail for this very reason — we do not water them as we should, and we fail to take into account the difference in soil or, what is the same thing, the varying circumstances."

"But you will not give up trying to raise tomatoes?"

"No ; but I shall try a variety adapted to our garden soil, and I shall take care to shield them from sun and wind and to water them faithfully. I will keep my mind upon them ; and if I have any success, I think that will be the secret."

"And how would you adapt the Sunday-school idea to the circumstances of this neighborhood?" asked Mr. Boynton, falling in with her fancy.

"I do not know as yet. I believe there is a solution of the problem that is practicable ; but that there must be an adaptation I am certain. It would be a disadvantageous situation in which to plant a mission or branch Sunday-school. I think we must take the gospel to the people ; just how I do not yet see clearly. I am not sure that there will not need to be a house-to-house visitation."

"It ought to be easy to go to one's neighbors with the wonderful offers which the gospel contains ; yet for myself I am afraid I should make awkward work of it. It certainly would require a great deal of tact. People expect such things from a minister, but were you or I to offer the Bible to Nate Griswold or Chad Loomis I suspect we would be ordered off the premises."

"What is the reason, I wonder, that it is such

a delicate matter to speak to a man of interests the most important of any that can concern him?" said Mrs. Boynton thoughtfully. Then after a little pause she added: "I conclude from what you say that Mr. Prentice is quite discouraged in regard to this field?"

"Yes; he thinks the labor and money can be applied more satisfactorily and with better results elsewhere. He says the people here have had the gospel offered to them over and over, and as they seem determined not to accept it, and as the people in foreign lands are calling for the truth, we ought to send it where it will be appreciated."

"'These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.' In the parable the Master of the vineyard sent servants and then other servants, and finally his own Son."

Mrs. Samuel Boynton had come into her new home with a heart aglow with love for Christ and with earnest desire to be a worker in the vineyard. The vineyard meant, to her mind, the church with its various organizations; the Sunday-school, the Christian Endeavor Society, the Woman's Missionary Society and the church prayer meeting. These were the grooves in which her active Christian life had heretofore

been set. Especially in the Sunday-school she had been an active and successful worker, and she had hoped that in the church to which she had transferred her membership she might take up the work to which she had been accustomed. But hindrances quite unexpected sprang up. Living four miles from the church, a strip of road intervening which at certain seasons of the year was well-nigh impassable for weeks together, and predisposed to a cough which forbade so long a drive in damp weather, there were many Sundays when she was numbered with the Shut-ins. There had been growing upon her this conviction, that "he who would work for God must be willing to do the sort of work needed where it is needed." She was coming to appreciate the grandeur of Christian work done in silence and in obscure fields.

Her thoughts were very busy through that summer afternoon. One conviction seemed to have taken hold of the minds of both these people: something must be attempted—some effort must be made to bring the gospel into the neighborhood. They discussed the plan of a reading circle or a literary society with the object in view of getting better acquainted with their

neighbors and so gaining an influence over them which might be used to draw them into the Kingdom.

"I am afraid I should not have much heart in the work," said Mrs. Boynton. "It would seem like losing time when I am so anxious to give them the best things."

When they had talked until it was time for the evening chores, and were no nearer a solution of their problem than when they began, Mr. Boynton said:—

"Louise will be here Tuesday and perhaps she will have suggestions. She is always full of schemes. Her very finger-tips seem to tingle with the desire to unravel any snarl which may be held up before her. She always finds an end somewhere to take hold of."

Louise Harper, Mrs. Boynton's sister and the expected guest, was a teacher in the town where was the original home of the Harpers, two or three hundred miles distant. She came, as anticipated, to spend her long summer vacation with her sister and brother. It was not long after her arrival before they were talking of the perplexing subject which had engrossed the thought of the Boyntons the previous Sunday afternoon.

I wonder if it seems strange to you that after the greetings and the inquiries about mutual friends, and relating the little incidents of the journey, this subject of Christian work should have been the first one touched upon by these long separated relatives? If these friends of mine are unusual Christians, it is not because of superior advantages or peculiar gifts. If they live nearer to God, it is only because they choose to do so. They have drawn nigh and, as the promise is, He has drawn nigh to them. This is all the difference between these and the multitude of Christians who leave plans of religious work to the ministers and the conferences and the associations. To these three, plans for winning souls were likely to come to the front.

As her brother stated the case, while they were still at the supper table, Louise exclaimed:—

“I know just what you want here! We had the same difficulties to contend with in an outlying district at home, and we think that the question has been solved for us. I have a statement of the entire scheme with pledges and record cards in my trunk.”

The Boyntons saw at a glance that the plans which Louise laid before them could readily be

adapted to their needs, and as the visitor assured them of the success of the work in the vicinity of Mrs. Boynton's old home, they were the more ready to adopt the main features of the plan.

"I will lay the matter before Mr. Prentice and our Sunday-school superintendent the first time I go to the village," said Mr. Boynton when he had taken in some of the possibilities of the scheme.

That same week brought two other strangers into the Boynton Neighborhood. Rena Colburn's medical adviser had ordered her into the country for the summer. Miserable and unhappy, yet declaring that she was not sick, the child seemed to have no choice as to where she was sent. Her father, loth to part with his only daughter and wishing to surround her with good influences, was at a loss where to send her in obedience to the physician's advice. At length, remembering a distant relative living out among the hills whom he had known in his boyhood as a sweet, gentle, pure-minded girl, he wrote to ask if she would take his motherless girl for a few months. A quick reply assured the child of a warm welcome; and, as the doctor said it was "just the thing," it was settled that Rena should spend at least the summer at the Lee homestead, the guest of Miss

Melinda Lee. In reply to Mr. Colburn's suggestion that his daughter should bring a maid, Miss Lee wrote: "I cannot consent; I wish Rena to come to me as my little sister, and we will wait upon ourselves and upon each other. My household tasks are very light and I can do for the dear child all that is necessary. I foresee that we shall have a sweet time together, and she will never think that I have a few gray hairs among my brown locks."

Rena Colburn was only sixteen, but she really thought that all of life worth living was done for her. Since she was six years old she had been cared for by hired nurses and housekeepers, until lately; and since she had been taking care of herself she had not made a very great success of it. Her father and her one brother, several years her senior, had suddenly come to realize that she was careless as regarded health and reckless as to associates, and hence this sudden transfer to the care of her cousin. When Mr. Willard Colburn returned home after seeing his sister safely under the hospitable roof of Miss Lee, he said to the anxious father:—

"We could not have chosen better. Cousin Melinda Lee is the brightest, cheeriest woman

imaginable. Why, she is ever so many years younger than our sad-faced little girl; and the air and the scenery up there among those hills are wonderful. I think we can rest easy about Rena."

"Yes, if that villain does n't find her out and try to regain his influence over her," returned the father sadly.

"You need not worry about that; he won't trouble her. I think I settled him. As soon as he found there was no money to be had he was ready enough to withdraw."

"Well, I hope you are right."

The other stranger coming into the neighborhood was only a boy—a well-grown lad of seventeen or eighteen. He walked over the hills, bringing his possessions in an old carpet bag, As his mother bade him good-by she said:—

"Cline, you know there is only one thing that troubles me about this going away from home. Mr. Carter is not a churchgoing man, and I am afraid you will not be able to attend church very regularly."

"You are probably right," replied the boy. "It must be four or five miles to the village and that is a long walk for a fellow who has to work hard

all the week. But, mother, I promise you to observe the Sabbath and to go to church as often as I possibly can."

"It almost seems as though I ought not to let him go," said the mother to herself as she turned back to her work, which had been left to take care of itself while she helped her boy off. "But we have been waiting for an opening for him, and I have asked the Lord to make the way plain and every other path is shut, so, though the way seems rather dark, I feel that this is the path He means the boy to walk in and I will just leave it all where I took it long ago — with the Lord."

## CHAPTER II.

### MISS HARPER BEGINS THE CANVASS.

MISS HARPER came downstairs dressed in a quiet walking suit. Her gloves, though only of lisle thread, matched the gray of her flannel dress; her broad-brimmed hat with its scarf of gray net shaded her face; her walking boots, while neither heavy nor clumsy, were well suited to the country roads. She and her sister had set apart that morning to begin the canvass of the neighborhood in the interest of the proposed scheme. Mr. Boynton had, as he proposed, laid the matter before the pastor and church officials to get, if possible, their endorsement of the undertaking. They said it was not practicable; it would cost money, and the prospects were not sufficiently promising to warrant the outlay. There would be a great deal of work connected with it, and the church needed all their time and energies. The people of that neighborhood were not of the sort to take hold of any scheme which called for mental exertion. In short, so discour-

aged were these good people in regard to this part of the Master's vineyard, that they looked coldly upon this proposal to make another effort to cultivate the field.

Mr. Boynton assured the gentlemen that the plan had in its main features been successfully worked and that it had the sanction of the leading denominational publishing houses by whom the circulars and record cards were issued. The circular letter embodied an appeal to the people in outlying regions, who were for various causes unable to attend public worship or join in the study and work of the Sunday-school, to band themselves together for the systematic study of the lessons in their homes. Record cards were furnished to be filled out each Sunday. A district or neighborhood secretary was expected to collect the cards each month and transfer the record to the secretary's book. Furthermore the circular letter stated that the members of this Bible Band, or, as they were called, Home Class, would meet occasionally to talk over the interests of the work. The pledge-cards, which the members were expected to sign, read as follows:—

I promise to join the Department of Home Classes for Bible study of District No. 1, and to spend at least one-half

hour every Sunday in the study of the lesson for the day, unless prevented by sickness or other good cause; and I will continue my membership until I notify the secretary of my withdrawal.

Mr. Boynton was also able to assure the gentlemen that by means of a duplicating apparatus Miss Harper would copy the revised circulars, which they had carefully adapted to the peculiarities of the field, so that the expense for printing would be no obstacle. One by one he was able to meet the objections and to show how the hindrances might be overcome, and at length the church Sunday-school agreed to recognize the Home Classes, when such should be formed, and to give them aid and sympathy.

"But I do not imagine," said Mr. Armstrong as they talked it over in teachers' meeting, "that we shall be bankrupted by any very heavy demands upon either our purses or our sympathies. That sort of thing which Brother Boynton proposes won't work among that class of people."

It may be that there were hours during the next few weeks when the Boyntons and Louise Harper would have agreed with him had they heard the remark; but, if that were the case, they never acknowledged it even to each other.

Through all the discouragements of that time of seed-sowing they never once spoke of the possibility of failure, though I am sure that sometimes the hope of successfully planting the gospel in that apparently sterile soil must have been a dim one.

The first step of these three loyal-hearted Christians in this effort to win souls for the kingdom and to uplift the moral character of the community was the beginning of a canvass of the neighborhood. This meant more than just sending the circular letter and pledge to individuals; it meant personal hand-to-hand, heart-to-heart work; it meant much time and strength spent in making numberless calls; it meant hours of earnest planning, and still other hours of pleading with the Lord of the vineyard. But Miss Harper was very hopeful that morning as she stepped out on the porch to wait for her sister, arranging meantime the packages of explanatory notes, cards of membership and pledges, so as to be prepared to make members out of any and all available material. Presently she heard voices in the sitting room and stepped back into the hall, wondering if her sister was detained with company. Hearing Louise's light footfall, Mrs. Boynton came out.

"I am sorry," she said, "but you will have to go alone or give it up for to-day. Mrs. Getman is here, and to spend the day. She is an old friend of Samuel's mother and likes to come to the old place now and then for a visit."

Louise was the picture of perplexity. "And to-morrow we are going to the city, and then the hay pressers will be here! I do not see that you can get away this week!"

"That is true. I think, Louise, you may as well make a beginning of the canvass by yourself. I am sure there must be some good reason why I am not permitted to go with you to-day. You know my theory, that when our plans are thwarted it is often true that they are not God's plans."

"Yes, I know, and it is plain enough that you must stay at home, but how do I know that I ought not to wait too?"

"Is there anything thrown across your path?—any good reason why you should not make a beginning of the work to-day?"

"No," replied Louise, hesitating a little as if in doubt, "only the fact that I am a stranger, and it may look queer for me to be calling on your neighbors alone."

"The majority of my neighbors are not of the

sort to be troubled by thoughts of there being any impropriety in that. The most of them will recognize you as my sister, and, as for its looking queer, do you not suppose that the whole plan and the attempt to carry it through will seem quite out of the ordinary to most of the people?"

"Very likely; and that is why I think that it would be better if you could go with me; they may not have much confidence in a stranger. Yet I dislike to put off making a beginning until next week."

"That will not do; the work ought to be started at once."

"But ought I not to stay and help entertain your guest, or help about the dinner so that you can give more time to her?"

"Not at all! She will want to follow me around while I get dinner and visit with Samuel when he comes in. Now I think of it, I will give you an errand which will answer for an introduction at two or three places. I think you know where most of the people live. You may invite Mrs. Loomis and Mrs. Carter and Miss Melinda Lee to visit here this afternoon with Mrs. Getman. They will enjoy it. I have heard Mrs. Getman say that some of these women seemed like her

children, she has known them so long and taken care of them through the croup and scarlet fever and the rest of the round."

So it came about that Louise Harper set out alone to begin the canvass of the Boynton Neighborhood in the interest of Home Classes for Bible study.

The Boynton farm was a corner lot, though the house stood nearly a quarter of a mile from the corners, so that going towards the north the neighbors were not very near. Turning the corner and walking a short distance along the crossroad, she came to Mr. Loomis' home.

Mrs. Loomis came forward to meet her guest. She held a little child in her arms; otherwise she was alone in the house, the other children being at school. "I think this is Mrs. Boynton's sister?" she said as she placed a chair for her visitor.

"Yes; my sister was coming out with me this morning for a walk and to make some calls, — if I am to spend my summers here, I want to get acquainted, — but she was hindered. She wishes you to spend the afternoon with her and visit with Mrs. Getman. As Mrs. Getman can only spend a day in the neighborhood, sister thinks it would

be pleasant for some of her old friends to come in and take tea and visit together."

"Mrs. Getman! I want to know! Well, I never expected to see her face again. She was always such a good friend to us, such a kind, motherly woman. She just mothered us younger women, and if some of us had taken her advice we would have been a sight better off;" and the woman sighed, and somehow Louise felt she was carrying a heavy burden.

"Well," said Miss Harper, as some reply seemed to be waited for,—though she hardly knew why she should be expected to reply or what she ought to say, — "I suppose we all find out sometimes that we would have been acting a wiser part if we had followed advice; but we all think at the time that we know best."

"It is n't always that. Sometimes we know the best and the right way and just turn and go the other way. That is what I did and now I am getting my pay for it!" The woman spoke bitterly, with a touch of despair in her voice.

"Have you a large farm here?" asked Miss Harper, not daring to encourage the woman to continue talking in the strain in which she had been indulging for the last remark or two.

"A large farm! We have n't any farm at all and never expect to have. We have only just the house and garden spot."

"Then of course you do not keep a horse?"

"A horse! I should think not."

"I was wondering if you went to a church and if your children went to Sunday-school?" said Louise, explaining. "I know that very few of the people about here do go, but as they are all strangers of course I do not know who goes."

"My! I have almost forgotten how a church looks! And as for the children going to Sunday-school—I wish they could go. I used to be a Sunday-school scholar; but my! there's everything against it. In the first place, they never could walk that far; besides I do not suppose their father would let them go anyway."

"I want to tell you about a little plan we have been getting up for as many as will join us," said Miss Harper. "You see, away out here in the country it is almost impossible to get to church and Sunday-school regularly, so we thought it would be a fine thing if a good many of the people would fall in with our plan. I have set out to see how many members I can get, so I go

prepared to show what the idea is and ready to enroll members." Then she unfolded her scheme, explaining with such skill that Mrs. Loomis was quite won over to the idea, but she said she did not think she would put down their names, for she almost knew Mr. Loomis would not like it. She handed back the pledge with a little sigh as she said: —

"He is almost always off somewhere Sundays and he would not care what the children were doing, only he hates everything that has to do with religion. And he will not have the children taught the Bible."

"But you are their mother?"

"Why, of course!"

"Well, you are responsible for their training; and it seems to me that if the father leaves them to you all day Sundays, you have not only a right to teach them the truths of the Bible, but it is a duty to do so. And anyway you can certainly take up the study for yourself?"

"He would n't like that."

It was evident to the visitor that what "he would n't like" was the ruling influence in this woman's life; and in her youth and inexperience she scarcely knew how to meet this difficulty.

With a swift prayer in her heart asking for the right words, she said :—

“Mrs. Loomis, I do not think that any man or any person has any right to come between a woman and her duty to God, to herself, or to her children. It is not pleasant to act contrary to the wishes of those we love, but sometimes when the duty is plain we have to do it, though the going forward in what we think the right way is very hard. And perhaps—indeed I believe it would be so—the influence of the Word of God on your own life and the lives of the children would be so marked that your husband would come to see things very differently, if only you had the courage to begin the work and keep at it in spite of opposition.”

“You don’t know him!” said the woman with set lips.

“True, I do not; but I know One who is stronger than he, One who will be on your side. With the Lord as your helper you can meet any amount of opposition.”

“I have heard folks talk like that before—about the Lord helping; but he never helped me!”

“I think you are mistaken. I am sure he has helped you a great many times, even though you

have never looked to him for help. His promises are to all who ask. I am sure that if you will look into his Word to see what he requires of you and will obey the command to teach the truth to your children, looking to God for wisdom and strength, you will find help, and a wonderful blessing will come to your home."

There was a softened expression coming into the woman's face, and tears seemed ready to fall as she said, drawing in her breath quickly : —

"You almost make me think I could do it!"

"Oh, do be quite persuaded!" exclaimed Louise. "I am sure you will become greatly interested in the study, and the long, lonely Sundays will pass more pleasantly."

## CHAPTER III.

### MISS HARPER FINDS CONTRASTS.

THE Sundays are dreadfully lonesome," said Mrs. Loomis, "and sometimes when I remember my own childhood and how particular father and mother were about Sundays and going to church and Sunday-school, it seems as though I should go wild at the thought of the way my children are growing up. We used to have books for Sunday reading and religious papers, but I don't ever see a religious book or paper nowadays; and he would n't have one in the house if he knew it."

"And have you nothing to read all the long days? I am sure my sister will lend you reading matter if you wish it."

"Oh, Mrs. Carter lets me have books any time; but they are not of the sort I was used to in my old home. They help to pass away the Sundays, but it never seems to me to be quite right to read novels on Sunday. I don't think the kind she lets me have are very profitable any day, though she does not seem to think them out of the way. But

I was brought up differently, and I would be glad to have my children brought up as I was, but I have given up hoping for anything like that." This was spoken in a despairing tone, and Louise made haste to reply : —

"I would not give up ; you can do a great deal to give your children proper training."

"There isn't much use in trying. I may just as well let things go."

The woman's tone was more hopeless than before, and again Louise answered quickly in a sympathetic voice : —

"I do not like to have you feel that way. You are too young to give up like that. To be sure you are a few years older than I, and perhaps you think I ought not to talk this way to you, but I have been a teacher several years, and you know we teachers get into a way of saying what we think, so you will excuse me, I am sure."

"Oh, you need not apologize ; I am only too glad to have some one to talk to, and I wish I could think it worth while to try your plan. But you do not know what it is to live with one who hates religion. He would destroy any good influence I might have over my children — he is so much stronger-willed than I am."

"But not stronger than you and God together," said Louise earnestly.

"As I told you, it does not seem to me that God helps much. And then I know so little; I don't think I could teach even the children, it is so long since I studied any. I used to be a fair scholar, but since I married and came away from home I have had no time for studying."

"But you see you have these quarterly magazines which give the text of the lesson and explain it." Miss Harper turned over the leaves and showed the plan, pointing out the explanation of the lesson.

Mrs. Loomis was certainly growing interested. She said: "Why, that is different from anything I ever saw. It looks easy. We used to have question books, but there were no answers, and I remember father used to help me get my lessons out of his big commentaries. I remember one book he had which I used to like because it was written so that I could understand it. I have wished a good many times that I had that book, but then it would have been of no use to me; he would have destroyed it long before this. I don't want you to think he is a bad or an ugly man, but he does n't believe in such things, and it makes him feel

cross to have anybody mention religion. So you see I know he wouldn't like it if I joined this. Still, as you say, I owe something to my children — and they are real smart children too, if I do say it, and they ought to have a better chance" —

Miss Harper sat very still; she was thinking and wondering how she could help this woman to a decision upon what seemed to her a vital question. Once let the study of God's Word be commenced under that roof and what might not be hoped for?

Presently she said softly: "Mrs. Loomis, I always carry my perplexities to Christ. Will you kneel with me here and we will talk to him about this matter which you cannot decide for yourself?"

A scared look came into the woman's face. She glanced out of the window and down the road. She had no reason to expect her husband home at that hour, yet she scarcely dared kneel to pray, lest he should come in unexpectedly and not like it. After a moment's hesitation she said: "I'd like to have you pray. I don't know when I've heard a prayer — not since father died!" and the tears rolled down her cheeks as she clasped the baby closer in her arms.

They knelt together, that fair young woman

with everything to make her life a joy, and the sad-hearted young mother, so weary of the monotony of her existence, so hungry for sympathy, so stinted as to happiness. Louise's voice, low and sweet but earnest and impassioned, pleaded with the Lord for the family dwelling under that roof, asking that the mother might have strength given her to take up her duty to herself and her children, pleading for the little children, that Christ would take them into his loving arms, and then that the Spirit of God would reach the father and that his blinded eyes might be opened to know the truth in Christ.

As they rose from the attitude of prayer, Mrs. Loomis, taking Louise's hand, said with more courage in her voice: "I will do it! My father would have wished it and his God will help me — I believe He sent you to help me. I may make poor work of it, but if I get into a puzzle you will help me, won't you?"

"Indeed I will do all I can to help you." And then and there Mrs. Loomis' name was enrolled as the first member of the Home Class of the Boynton Neighborhood.

"I shall not get on very fast if I make such long calls everywhere," said the visitor, preparing to go.

"I hope you will not be sorry that you stayed so long here," responded Mrs. Loomis, smiling more cheerfully than she had done during the interview. "If good comes out of this promise I have just given, you will not regret the time spent, will you?"

"Indeed I will not! And I am glad to know the neighbors."

"Perhaps you will not find the next woman so hard to persuade," continued Mrs. Loomis, still smiling and smoothing the baby's silken hair. She was wondering in her heart if this baby daughter would grow up to be as bright and beautiful and helpful as the young woman who, with "Be sure and come this afternoon," as a parting word, was crossing the dusty street on the way to Mrs. Carter's.

Mrs. Carter was a contrast to Mrs. Loomis in her full round form, her rosy complexion, and her busy, bustling ways. She was the wife of a farmer, "well-to-do," as the saying is, and her home lacked none of the comforts and conveniences so noticeably absent in the poor little house across the way. The caller was ushered into the parlor, which was quite expensively furnished, though there were few of those delicate touches

which make a room habitable. There were no books visible, though had the visitor penetrated to the family sitting room she would have found quite a collection of books of the class of which Mrs. Loomis had spoken. And then could she have gone farther and taken a look into the room of the eldest daughter of the house she would have been surprised to find quite a different atmosphere. Lillian Carter was fourteen, earnest, thoughtful, and studious. Already she looked upon life far more seriously than either parent seemed to. People often remarked how very unlike the other members of the family was this daughter; yet those who knew her father well, especially in his boyhood, said that Lillian had inherited many of his traits of character.

Miss Harper had no difficulty in introducing herself. Mrs. Carter was voluble in her welcome, expressing her surprise and pleasure with no stint of words. She received Mrs. Boynton's invitation with evident satisfaction, though she did not express any delight at the prospect of meeting her old neighbor, and Louise fancied that she was more pleased with the idea of being on visiting terms with her new neighbor.

When the real object of the call was made

known Mrs. Carter said "No" at once. She had no taste for study herself, never cared for books and never expected to. She could n't teach the children if she wanted to; and anyway her children were too young to know anything about religion. She believed in waiting until a child was old enough to choose for himself, and then let him decide for himself what he would believe and what not. She did n't see any need of so much study anyway. If one knew the Ten Commandments, that was enough.

Had Mrs. Carter's opinions been of the most profound order and the result of years of laborious thought and research, they could not have been expressed with more confidence and decision.

She said she could n't see the use of so much studying anyway. Some of the neighbors were sending their girls off to seminaries to be educated, and her oldest girl wanted to go; but what was the use of so much education? She got all her own education in a district school, and she never went much anyway; but she knew enough to keep house, and that was all that was necessary.

It had been easier for Louise to talk with Mrs. Loomis, whose weary heart she could read through the cold, hard face, than with this narrow-minded,

shallow-brained woman, with her "anyways" and bad pronunciation and worse grammar, who was so satisfied with her own low attainments. However, wisdom was given her, and she succeeded in getting a promise that, if Mrs. Carter's children chose to take up the study, she would not forbid or discourage them. This last part of the promise Louise was doubtful about; for she argued that the mother's refusal to join in the study or be interested in it would in itself be a discouragement.

Having delivered her sister's invitation she went on her way, thinking what a wonderful thing it would be if only the enlightening, uplifting, and transforming power of Christianity could come into Mrs. Carter's life!

The morning was slipping away, and she hastened on to the pretty little home of Miss Lee, a mile farther up the same street.

"I have quite the start of you," said Miss Lee, laughing a little. "I have been teaching my tenant's children for more than a year, every Sunday afternoon; but I shall be delighted to join and be recognized as a part of something! So you may put our names down at once.

"No, I do not often get to church. I am quite

dependent upon my tenant, who is not a church-going man. I hope the way will open for me to get a new tenant, or have this one made over — else I shall try to have a horse that I can drive.”

“As you seem to have in mind three ways out of the difficulty, one of them surely ought to open to you!” was Miss Harper’s half-laughing reply.

“All in good time. You see I have an idea that sometimes when the Lord wants us to do a special work for him he shuts us right down to it! Now maybe if I had been permitted to go to church and Sunday-school every Sunday I might not have become interested in these children. So I think he wanted them taught and shut me up here with them. It is as if he had said: Now she can drink right from the Fountain, and I will show her wondrous things out of my Word, which she shall try to tell those children. She is that slow to see her opportunities that she must be shut up with them before she discovers that they are close to her! And I tell you, Miss Harper, the Lord has blessed me wonderfully in the work, and I believe he has made me a help to those children. They have got a lot of truth stored up in their heads and I trust some of it has found a way into their hearts!

“Visit with Mrs. Getman? Indeed I’ll come! Yes, she used to live in this neighborhood — you know the Winchell place? Well, that is the old Getman homestead. It was a dark day for this neighborhood when Mr. Getman died and his wife went away to live with her daughter at Pine Hill. I owe everything that I am, even my life, to her! She came to me in my days of sorrow and took care of me through a dreadful fever, and showed me that God had brought me back to living again, desolate though it was, for some purpose. It was through her that I came to see in the Lord a loving Father, and was led to put my hand in his for the rest of the journey! I shall be very glad to see her. But may I bring my guest? Oh, I must explain — I have a young girl, a cousin, staying with me. I should like to have you know her. She is scarcely more than a child in years, but, growing up without a mother, she is old in a good many ways, and she needs a young woman for a friend. She is a little given to moping and writing in her diary. I hope you can get her to join your Bible class or whatever you call it. No, she is not in now; she went over to the pond with the Hesler children, but I’ll venture to say that she is under a tree somewhere reading one of

those trashy books she brought along. I do hope you can get hold of her! Someway I can't help thinking that the Lord has sent you to help her, as he sent Mrs. Getman to me."

As Louise left the house she said to herself: "How unlike are these three women whose acquaintance I have made this morning! They all interest me, but some way Mrs. Loomis appeals most to my sympathies. I must ask sister about her."

## CHAPTER IV.

MRS. WINCHELL.

A CARRIAGE was passing, a low phaëton, drawn by a sleek pony. A lady was driving. The custom of keeping the roadsides closely cropped did not prevail in that locality, and Louise Harper, stepping aside from the wagon track, stood in the long, dusty grass, with its mingling of ragweed, to let the phaëton pass. The lady drew up the reins, saying, —

“Excuse me, but I think this is Mrs. Boynton’s sister? If you are on your way to her home, you have a long walk. Please get in and let me drive you to your sister’s.”

In response to Louise’s protest she said:—

“It is no trouble, rather a favor to me. I am out under compulsion. The doctor insists that I must drive out every day, but it is not pleasant to be driving about with no objective point.”

“But it must be lovely to have a horse and be able to take people out for rides!” said Louise as she accepted the invitation and settled herself in

the cushioned seat, realizing all at once how very tired she was.

"Yes," replied the lady, "if there were any one to take out, it would make my drives less irksome."

"Any one to take!" echoed Louise. "Excuse me, but it seems to me that this neighborhood is full of women."

"Oh, well, you know—but perhaps, as you are a stranger, you do not know—that we have very few cultured people here in the country. Aside from your sister, who is almost always too busy to favor me, I do not know of one with whom I should enjoy driving unless it might be Miss Melinda Lee."

"Yes, but"—and Louise stopped, suddenly remembering that she was speaking to an entire stranger.

"But what?" asked her companion, who was evidently interested in the bright-faced girl and desirous of hearing what might be the thought over which she hesitated.

"Nothing; only I was wondering whether they would not enjoy it all the same."

"And you think I ought to sacrifice myself for the sake of others?" was the smiling question.

"I do not think any *oughts* for other people," replied Louise, laughing; "but I have been calling on some of the neighbors this morning, and it seems to me that some of the women have so few things to enjoy; their lives are so narrowed, and the worst of it is, they do not know it."

"And you think I might by a little effort and self-sacrifice broaden things for them somewhat? May I ask if you propose to do something in that line yourself?"

"Yes; that was part of my errand out this morning. I have a plan which, if carried out, would, I think, open new fields of thought and give great comfort and pleasure to the families of this locality."

"Indeed! And is it a *secret*?" The tone of the questioner was interested.

"No secret. I suppose I should have called upon you soon in the interest of the scheme, and if you care to listen, I will explain now."

"Certainly! I will let the pony walk, and you shall tell me of this philanthropic scheme of yours. Pardon me, but you do not look at all like the typical philanthropic young woman."

"Indeed we had not thought of it by any such dignified name. It is just a little plan which we

have tried at home, and my sister and her husband have talked it over; and, as perhaps you know, Mrs. Boynton is not always able to go to Sunday-school, as she has been accustomed to do all her life heretofore, and as there are many others in the neighborhood who are kept at home, we thought this plan would be a good one to try here."

Then Louise laid before the puzzled listener the plan of Home Classes for the study of the Bible. Her new acquaintance listened, but whether out of politeness or interest Louise could not determine. But when she had finished her explanation and shown the cards and pledges the lady said:—

"That is an original idea! It would just suit my mother, and I think I shall have to join for her sake. You see, Miss Harper, mother is blind, and we read to her, though I am afraid the dear woman does not get as much Bible reading as she would like to have. Now with something laid out so that I would know just where to turn and what to do, I think the work would not be so irksome. Come up some day soon and tell mother about it, and if she likes the idea you may depend upon our joining. I should never go into it for myself, but one can do things for a blind mother."

"Excuse me," said Louise, a little farther on, "but do you attend the same church that my brother and sister do?"

"Well, perhaps the best answer to that would be to say that we would go there if we went at all. Now you are shocked. For several years, in fact ever since my husband's death, I have been something of an invalid. His death was sudden and the shock brought on nervous prostration, and I have fallen into the way of thinking that I could not attend church. In Mr. Winchell's lifetime we always went. I used to be a member in my old home, but I suppose they have dropped my name, though I presume I am as good as many who go to church every Sunday."

As she finished this remark she turned and looked full in the girl's face, laughing as she added:—

"See here, my dear, I know you are just dying to ask questions. I see them all over your face! Now I give you permission to ask all you want to. You wonder who I am and where I live that I am so much of a heathen, and if I have any children."

"Well, yes. I can guess, however, that you are Mrs. Winchell, and that you live in the stone

house on the hill. But I was wondering if you have any children, and if they never go to church or Sunday-school, and whether in case you join the Home Class you would include them in your hour."

"You have guessed right as far as you have guessed at all. I have one son, a big boy; I don't suppose he has seen the inside of a church since he was ten years old. You make me ashamed of the way I have brought him up."

"I make you ashamed? Why, I have not said a word that could be construed into a rebuke or censure, have I?"

"No, my dear; you have been perfectly courteous and ladylike; but you can no more help your thoughts on the subject than you can help showing them in your face.

"But really, Miss Harper," continued Mrs. Winchell, "do you have any hopes of getting the people out here to take hold of this scheme of yours? They are not accustomed to mental exertion, I judge, though I must confess that I know very little about my neighbors, and I am afraid they will not take kindly to the idea of systematic study of anything. You have, I doubt not, been trained to such habits and cannot realize that it will require more patience and self-denial than

people without any sort of culture will be willing to put forth."

"I suppose that many of these people around here are not very well educated, yet some of those I have met seem to have bright intellects and to be eager for something to vary the sameness of life. Mrs. Loomis appears like quite an intelligent woman."

"Mrs. Loomis? Yes, I am told she was a very bright girl, the daughter of a minister, who threw herself away when she married Chad Loomis. But I suppose she did not think it was going to turn out this way. Chad's father was a good man, a deacon. He left this boy, who was an only child, quite a property, and he has let it slip away, not so much in dissipation and fast living as from sheer shiftlessness. I am told that she is rather afraid of him and seldom asserts herself, even with her children, and the consequence is that they soon grow away from her control. Your plan might reach her if he could be kept from opposing her."

"She has given her name as a member. She tells me that her husband is seldom at home Sundays, and that of course she can spend the day as she likes."

“But, Miss Harper, if you are thinking about elevating the tone of society here, why not introduce something which will attract men of Mr. Loomis’ stamp? There are a number of irreligious families who will have nothing to do with religion or with the Bible, who might be reached with some literary scheme. Now I am very much interested in the Chautauqua Circles, and I have wished that I were a little stronger that I might try to start a circle here. I thought your sister would join, and perhaps Miss Lee. I confess I had not counted upon interesting the others; but I believe it would be more likely to succeed than your plan. Or, are you not interested in that work?”

“Yes, indeed! I am almost an enthusiast on that subject. I belong to a circle at home, but that does not seem to embody just the thought we have in mind here. A literary society or a reading circle can never take the place of church and Sunday-school, and this is what we want a substitute for. Besides, our scheme only calls for a half hour’s study on Sunday, whereas the other demands nearly an hour every day. And, as you have remarked, the people would doubtless be averse to any undertaking requiring great mental

effort. We need to adapt the means to the end in view."

"I see; but I think you will find opposition to anything distinctively religious."

"Very likely; but do you not think that there are many in this neighborhood who would go to church and Sunday-school if they had the opportunity?"

"Yes, no doubt there are a few; though I presume the majority would stay away if the church were next door; that is, the men. Very likely the women and children would go."

"Well, then, if only the women and children can be interested, we will try to enlist them; and you know if the tone of a woman's thought is elevated, she will lift up her family."

As Mrs. Winchell let Louise out at Mr. Boynton's door and turned her horse's head towards home, she let the animal walk, almost forgetting herself and the hour in the thoughts that rushed upon her. She was carried backward to the years when she was interested in religious things. She remembered how she used to study the Bible and the Catechism of a Sunday afternoon, sitting beside her mother, and then, a little later, she saw herself standing with a score of others before the

altar, taking upon herself the vows of church membership. She looked over years of inactivity in the church and said to herself:—

“Here is this girl, a stranger just here for the summer, filled with the desire to help the people to a better life; and here am I, expecting to spend the remainder of my life in this neighborhood, doing nothing, looking down upon my neighbors, living a selfish, aimless life! That is just what it amounts to! What makes my life differ so from the life of the Boyntons?”

Karl Winchell was waiting to take his mother's horse, and presently they sat down to dinner. Mrs. Winchell was very quiet, which unusual circumstance the son attributed to weariness, and he asked anxiously:—

“Mother, did you take too long a drive this morning?”

“A little longer than usual, but more enjoyable than usual, too. Karl, I have been thinking that we ought to be a little more social with our neighbors. I do not know but we have held ourselves too much aloof.”

Karl lifted his eyebrows in wonder over this astonishing remark. For Mrs. Winchell to show any interest in her neighbors, whom she looked

upon as several steps lower than her family in the social scale, was something to be wondered at. She added after a moment's pause:—

“And, Karl, I took up Miss Harper, Mrs. Boynton's sister, you know, and really she is a very interesting person. I think it would be well to call upon her.”

Karl whistled softly in reply and did not say that, having seen a girlish figure with fair face and graceful motions flitting through the Boynton grounds and about the neighborhood, he had arrived at the same conclusion.

## CHAPTER V.

### WEARY AND ONLY SIXTEEN.

THAT same evening Miss Harper and Rena Colburn sat together on the front porch in most friendly fashion, the young guest sitting on the step, leaning against her new friend with the most confiding air imaginable. Mrs. Boynton's guests still lingered, Miss Lee waiting for Mr. Boynton, who had offered to drive home with her and Miss Colburn; and Mrs. Loomis and Mrs. Carter would walk home together in the cool of the evening. It had been a long time since anything so bright as that afternoon's pleasure had come into Mrs. Loomis' life. They had all enjoyed the visit with their old friend and their hearts had softened under the freshly awakened memories of the old days and the many kindnesses of Mrs. Getman when she was their neighbor.

The subject of Home Classes had been brought up and explained to Mrs. Getman, who, seeing at once the advantages of the scheme, had thrown her

influence in with Mrs. Boynton. But Mrs. Carter was not easily won. Her opposition was less marked than it had been in the morning, but she did n't see the use; she had no fondness for study and was too old to begin; besides, she wanted Sundays to rest in; they were apt to have company, or go visiting, and she was not going to pin herself down to the Bible with a lot of children. They might study if they had a mind to, and she would n't wonder if the new boy who had come to work for Mr. Carter would like to take it up. She guessed he was one of that kind anyway.

Miss Lee was enthusiastic, and Mrs. Loomis grew interested and strengthened in her resolution to undertake the work, though in her heart she was sure that, if her husband should find it out, he would forbid it. But she was growing more determined to assert her right to teach the truths of the religion of her own parents to the children left by their negligent father so entirely to her care and management. In a little aside talk with her old friend her fears came to light.

"But, my child," said Mrs. Getman, "while I counsel a giving in as to things reasonable and even sometimes in unreasonable demands if a principle of right is not involved, when it comes

to matters of conscience and those things which have to do with your duty to God and your children's welfare, you must be firm and do what is right. The Lord will be your strength and your shield if you go forward in his name."

Meanwhile out in the gathering twilight Rena Colburn's tired little heart was reaching out for sympathy.

"If brother Samuel can spare a horse some day soon, will you go with me to finish the canvass of the neighborhood?" asked Miss Harper. "You see," she added, "I am counting you in as a helper in the work."

"I am afraid I cannot be much help, but I should enjoy riding with you—at least as much as I enjoy anything nowadays."

"Dear child, at your age you ought to enjoy everything! I am five years older than you, and I believe I enjoy every hour of life."

"I know that. I have found out so much just in the few hours I have known you, but if you had such a sorrow as mine, you would talk differently."

Miss Harper hesitated a moment. Only a few hours had passed since she knew of the existence of this young girl, and still fewer since she first

saw her — was it too soon to hope for her confidence? too soon to throw out that upon which this drifting soul might float into the harbor of peace? What had this twilight hour alone with this girl been given to her for? Perhaps it was for the beginning of the work of the redemption of a soul. She would move carefully — but she would move!

“Is it too soon — am I too much of a stranger for you to tell me about it?” she asked softly, her hand passing lightly over the dark hair that lay so smoothly upon the shapely head and hung in a heavy braid, schoolgirl fashion.

“You do not seem at all like a stranger. It just seems as if I had known you years and years!” said the girl with great earnestness. “I’ve a mind to tell you about it. I have not told cousin Melinda; she would think me a silly little goose, as I suppose I am, to be grieving over what is over and done with and which they all think a piece of folly. I do not know how much my brother told her, but he is such a proud fellow I think he would be so ashamed to have cousin Melinda know that his sister had been just ready to throw herself away — that is his idea of it all.”

The story which Rena Colburn told, the growing darkness hiding the pained expression of her face, though the trembling voice and the occasional quivering of her muscles told the listener of the emotion of the speaker, I will give briefly.

Rena Colburn had lived for months in a beautiful dream. She was wide-awake now, but it was so hard to take up life as it seemed to her it must always be, lonely and desolate. Her father and brother, though very kind, she felt were quite out of patience with her, and so had no sympathy for her. Edgar Van Bergen was twenty years older than herself, and he had been trying to persuade her to give her life into his keeping, and she had well-nigh fallen into the snare. The fact that he was so many years her senior, and an old acquaintance of the family, had thrown the father and brother off their guard, and the mischief had been done before they had thought of any danger to their darling. By the terms of her mother's will, if Rena married before the age of twenty-one without her father's consent, a large property bequeathed by the mother was to go to John; otherwise to be divided between the two.

"Why don't you keep still and let me marry Mr. Van Bergen and you would get all the money?"

asked Rena angrily when at last, awakened to the real state of affairs, her brother interfered in the matter.

"Because I love my little sister better than I love money," was the reply.

"You mean you love your own way better! If you loved me, you would let me be happy."

"Will you not understand that it is because I want to save you from unhappiness that I have interfered? But, Rena, Ed Van Bergen will not marry you without your father's consent, now that he knows the consequences."

"He would!" declared the girl, "if there was not a better way. We will wait until I am of age."

"That will be five years, and he will not wait. He is up to his ears in debt and he wants your fifty thousand to satisfy his creditors. Now that he knows he cannot get it he will withdraw his suit."

"I don't believe it!" said the girl with increasing indignation.

But it turned out that John was right. Suspecting that Mr. Van Bergen was trying to persuade Rena to marry him in spite of her father's opposition, John had that morning taken occasion

to interview the man, telling him the terms of the will, and adding, "My advice to you is to withdraw. It will not help matters to persuade my sister to disobey her father, for that will cut her off without a penny of her mother's estate, and I assure you that you need not expect father to relent. He is not made of that sort of stuff. If you wait until she is of legal age, that is another matter. You would probably have your reward if you could afford to wait." This last with an emphasis which Mr. Van Bergen understood.

That evening while Rena waited for her lover, in whom she had unshaken faith, a note was brought to her which ran like this:—

*My Dear Little Girl,*—Perhaps you are right and I ought not to try to persuade you to act contrary to your father's wishes and commands. It grieves me to say farewell. I can never forget my little darling, but I shall love you always. I hope you will be happy. I shall go to Europe as soon as I can make arrangements. Yours faithfully,

EDGAR VAN BERGEN.

"That means as soon as he can win money enough at the card table to pay his passage," said John, to whom Rena showed the note which to the poor child seemed, at a first reading, to prove the nobility and sacrifice of her friend.

Later when John, fearing that she was going to cherish his memory and perhaps live upon the hope of his one day returning to claim her, detailed to her the conversation of the morning, it became clear to the girl that her brother was right and that the chief attraction had been her money, not herself.

And this was the girl who had come into the Boynton Neighborhood to meet, all unwittingly, the two people who were to have a wonderful influence upon her after life.

Louise Harper listened to the story told in girlish fashion. There was a pathetic little wail running through it as she told of a father immersed in business life, of a brother absorbed in intellectual pursuits, both too busy to give her either companionship or sympathy.

"John would die for me, I think," said Rena with earnestness, "but he never has time to talk to me or listen to my music, and father will surely die making money for John and me, but he never thinks there are things a girl wants more than money. And so when Mr. Van Bergen began to notice me and to seem to like my singing and my silly chatter, when he was always doing those nice little things that John forgot about, bringing me

fruit and bonbons and flowers, why should n't I have grown fond of him? I tell you, Miss Harper, he is the handsomest and most fascinating man that I ever saw, and I had grown so used to him I thought I should die when he went away — just because I missed him so! Did you ever miss anybody and just go on missing him more and more every day until it seemed as if the world — I mean your world — was a hollow globe and you were alone in it, reaching out after some one you had been used to? Of course I know now that it was my money, or the money he supposed I had, that he wanted. I know now that he was a fraud clear through, but some way that does n't help as much as I suppose it ought to. I miss what I thought I had, and I don't care much about living. There you have the story, and now that you know it all, you will be patient with me, won't you? Cousin Melinda thinks I am moody and that I spend too much time 'moping,' as she calls it. Then she thinks I read too many novels; but that is the only time I forget all about my troubles. I guess she thinks I was wild and was sent into the country against my will, and that I have made up my mind to be unhappy about it; but the truth is I would much rather

be here and be let alone than live anywhere else, and my cousin is lovely about that as about everything else — she lets me alone for the most part.”

“I am sure I shall not be ‘lovely’ if loveliness consists in letting people alone, for I mean to make you help me in carrying out my schemes. But, my dear child, I am sorry for you.”



GETTING ACQUAINTED.



## CHAPTER VI.

### GETTING ACQUAINTED.

MRS. BOYNTON gave a "tea" to the young people in honor of her sister. It was not a large party, for there was not material out of which to make up a large gathering. Rena Colburn, who spent half her waking hours at the Boynton homestead, was there as a matter of course; and Karl Winchell, who had been so unfortunate as to find Miss Harper out when he had called in accordance with his mother's suggestion and his own thought, now had the pleasure of making the young woman's acquaintance. In that neighborhood there was little of the caste feeling, and Cline Eastman's appearance at a social gathering in company with his employer's daughter surprised no one. There were half a dozen others, with Miss Melinda Lee to help Mrs. Boynton in the work of getting supper. The tables were set in the yard under the old trees, and tea was served a little later than the usual hour of country suppers in order to accommodate the farmer boys,

who could only come after the day's work was done. The tea was simple yet served with care, even with elegance; and some of those boys and girls had their first glimpse of real refinement as shown in the getting up and serving of a plain supper.

There had been no apparent effort to turn the conversation in the line of the proposed Bible study, and yet as they sat at the little tables, chatting over their cups of chocolate, one and another were asking, "Are you going to join?"

Miss Harper, sitting at the table with Karl Winchell and Lillian Carter, with Rena Colburn by her side, was saying, —

"I am very glad to know you, Mr. Winchell. I have already expressed to these young ladies my delight at meeting them. As I am to spend the summer here, and very likely other summers, I want to get acquainted with the people, especially the young people. You know a teacher gets in the way of being interested in all young people. Then we get the idea that we can help them, and we are apt to have our pet schemes to carry out."

"I see!" returned Mr. Winchell. "You are on the lookout for some one to test your theories upon."

"Exactly," was her quick response. "You are very ready at catching my thought."

"And do I strike you as being a good subject for your experiments?" he asked, laughing.

"Well, I was not thinking of you so much in that light as in the capacity of a helper. Of course I expect you to be interested in my plans for their own sake, but I also want your influence in helping me to win the young people of the vicinity."

"I fear your estimate of my influence is beyond its worth. I do not count for much among the neighbors. I have been away at school ever since we moved here until two years ago, and, the fact is, I do not know much about the people."

"Then you and Miss Harper and I are on the same footing," said Rena Colburn. "We three can consider ourselves a committee to — convert the Boynton Neighborhood. Is that your idea, Miss Harper?"

"Oh, dear, no! Don't put it that way! We want to interest our friends here — those who seldom or never have the chance to go to church — in Bible study at home. That is the idea."

"Whew!" ejaculated Mr. Winchell, adding quickly, "Excuse me, Miss Harper, but is n't that

quite an undertaking? I am afraid you do not know this neighborhood as well even as I do."

"I only know that there are human souls here cut off from all religious privileges — some of them longing for sympathy and help, others not caring."

"I take it, then, that you consider 'religious privileges,' as you term it, an essential to human felicity?"

The tone perhaps, more than the words, was a revelation to Miss Harper of the religious beliefs or non-beliefs of the young man. She was not disposed to enter into an argument with her visitor, but she must have looked her surprise, for he immediately added: —

"Excuse me, Miss Harper, for so speaking. But if they do not care, why should you? 'Don't care' is a very comfortable boat to sail in; don't you think so?"

"But would you have the nation drift back to heathenism?"

"Not much danger of that while there are people like the Boyntons and yourself with your tugs headed the other way to tow the people back," responded the young man with a laugh.

"But there are some who do care — who really

need our help and sympathy," said Miss Harper, still serious.

"Oh, I don't know! The people do not seem to me to call for much in that line. For the most part, I should say they are quite content."

"I beg your pardon, but I am afraid you do not know what you are talking about. There are women in this neighborhood on the verge of insanity because of loneliness and lack of outside interests. They have been turned back upon themselves until their minds are stagnant and their hearts are breaking. If they can be aroused to interests outside themselves, they may be saved for their families and the community."

Then, in reply to Mr. Winchell's questioning, Miss Harper gave him a brief outline of the plan. He listened politely, then said:—

"But would not the end you have in view be reached better by some other plan? Why not take up something which will call out the activities of the people along the line of intellectual development? a Chautauqua Circle for instance, or something in the way of physical culture—a Delsarte class or a tennis club?"

"Those things are good and will, I think, come in time. But I believe we need a foundation to

build upon, and there can be none better than a knowledge of the Bible. If we do not find time in this world for the other things, it will not matter so much, but we cannot afford to do without the sort of culture which the proposed plan will give."

Then the conversation drifted away to other topics. Later in the evening some one asked:—

"What hour will be best? Shall we all take the same hour?"

Mrs. Boynton replied: "We shall take the hour from three to four. That seems a convenient one for most people."

Then Karl Winchell, in an aside to Louise, said:—

"Why, are you going to join? I supposed it was intended only to have people who never go to church; a sort of missionary effort among the heathen!"

Louise replied: "Of course we shall join. We do go to church generally, and hope to have a great many double X's on our record cards; but there are many Sundays in the year when my brother and sister cannot get out to church, if the reports which I have heard of snowbanks and mud are to be credited."

"I was going to ask you to drive with me to the lake next Sunday, starting about three ; but, if you are going to pin yourself down with a Bible, I suppose it is useless to give the invitation. Perhaps you would go later?"

"Neither earlier nor later on Sunday, Mr. Winchell, thanking you for the kindness."

"But you ride to church in the earlier part of the day. Is it any worse to ride in the afternoon than in the morning? If the part of the day makes any difference, I will come for you before breakfast."

"It is true," replied Louise, not noticing his last suggestion, "I ride to church, but I do not ride for pleasure on Sunday."

"I suppose you find that obsolete idea in the Bible?" he said, still retaining the tone of good-natured ridicule; then suddenly changing his manner he added: "Excuse me; I do not mean to tread on any of your pet theories. It is all right, and if you would like to go, I will call for you some other time. I thought, perhaps, if we went Sunday afternoon, I would take the surrey and invite your friend Miss Colburn and young Eastman to go with us. I presume Eastman would not be able to get away from his work on a week day. But we will try to manage it."

Meantime Lillian Carter was saying, "I'd like to join that society or circle, or whatever they call it, real well; but we have n't a Bible, and I do not suppose I could coax father to get one."

"That will be all right," said Cline Eastman. "You can use mine and, if you like, we can all study together. I have been thinking that it would be a nice place to read and study down under the big butternut on Miss Lee's line. I could fix some seats and a rustic table, and perhaps Miss Lee and Miss Colburn would like to sit there sometimes, and Sunday afternoons you could take the children there and we could study together."

"Why, Cline, you are just splendid!" said the girl enthusiastically. "It will be nice to belong to something! I thought I was going to be left out of things always. Was n't it just too lovely for anything in Mrs. Boynton to invite me this evening? You see I am too young to go with the young ladies, and too big to go with the little girls, so I get left out. Do you know I want to go away to school?"

"Do you? Well, why should n't you go?"

"Just because they won't let me. Mother says she got her education at a district school, and what

was good enough for her is good enough for me. I suppose she is right, but I shall get more education than is to be had at our school, some way. Now here comes this Bible study; this will help some. If I had books to begin Latin or some other higher study, I would not waste time over this, but, as I have n't, I may as well go into it and make what I can out of it."

"I think that is a good resolution," said Cline. "And now let's go and talk to Miss Lee about the butternut tree. I think it is just a little prettier on her side of the line."

Miss Lee fell in with the plans of her young neighbors and was ready to further them.

"There is a pile of lumber under the long shed," she remarked, "and it might be a good plan to use that for a sort of shanty or cabin in which to store things we might want to have down there. I should like to take down one of my cushioned chairs, and it would be nice to have a hammock. There is an old one in the attic that could be used, I think."

"I'll make a beginning to-morrow night after I'm through work," declared Cline.

As Karl Winchell was saying good night, Miss Harper remarked:—

"Then we may not hope for your coöperation in our scheme?"

"Really, I would not like to pledge myself to anything of the sort. I shall not oppose it, of course ; but I am afraid I am not a very hopeful subject for you to experiment upon," was his lightly spoken reply.

Mr. Winchell continued to make light of the plan. He could not be said to oppose. He never opposed anything. He was a well-educated young man, living on at home, partly because it suited him very well and partly because of his invalid mother's wish. He called himself very liberal in his religious views. He did not play ball on Sunday and this was the reason he gave :—

"I respect the laws of the land and the opinions and prejudices of a large class in the community. But if other people choose to play, I make no objections. I do not believe the Bible myself, but so long as many people do, they may as well be indulged in their beliefs. I have no ambition to set up as an advocate of any system of belief or unbelief. I want the privilege of believing or disbelieving as I choose, and other people may adhere to whatever absurdity they please."

After the guests had departed they sat down to talk it over.

"Well, Lou, what do you think of our neighborhood now?" asked Mr. Boynton.

"I think it is quite time the 'higher education' of the Boynton Neighborhood had begun."

"Ah! You think you have discovered a mine of undeveloped talent?"

"Well, I think there are minds here capable of appreciating the beauties of our religion, and hearts that are hungering for something better than they have at present, and souls for whom Christ suffered that have not yet heard the gospel. You know, brother, when I meet a bright intellect I long to give it a lofty ambition, even the loftiest; and when I meet a weary, struggling soul I feel as though I must at any cost show that soul where to lay its burden. And both classes are here."

"Did you notice young Eastman much?"

"Yes; I observed him particularly because he wore a little ribbon badge with the letters 'Y. P. S. C. E.' I am much interested in that society."

"I think it quite likely that you are!" said Mr. Boynton, laughing. "I wonder if there is a society in which you are not interested."

"But I am especially interested in this one, and

I made him talk about it, which he was very ready to do. He seems a bright fellow and well educated so far. Who is he and what is he doing here?"

"He is Mr. Carter's farm hand just now. He comes from a good family over the river. His father died last year and left only a small property, and this boy has set out to take care of himself. I understand that he wants to study medicine and is trying to earn money to take him through a course of study."

"What a pity, when there is so much wasted on rich men's sons who amount to nothing, that a boy with evident talent should have to spend his best strength earning money to fit himself to do his real work in the world!"

"Then you don't believe that a boy is made stronger and better fitted to do his work by the struggle with poverty?"

"Oh, I suppose the tree that grows out on the bleak hillside grows more rugged and sends its roots out farther than those that receive care and culture in the orchard; but when it comes to the fruit I can't see that the advantage is on the side of the tree that has had to breast the storms and endure the droughts unpruned and unmulched. I don't want to make hothouse plants of the boys,

but I do wish this new acquaintance of mine could have a little of the help and encouragement that is thrown away upon others whom I could name."

"You do not include young Winchell in your list?" asked Mrs. Boynton, smiling.

"Not exactly, yet my impresssion of him is that he is sure to spoil his life unless some new and awakening influence comes into it. He lacks ambition; he is intellectual and rather proud of his intellect and his own attainments, and what I mean by saying he lacks ambition is that he seems to have no thought of using himself and his powers for the benefit of anybody except Karl Winchell, and so he lives an aimless sort of a life."

"You must have studied him closely in the little time you saw him," remarked Mr. Boynton with a teasing smile.

"Well, we chanced to strike topics which brought out his peculiarities and he talked freely. Of course I may be mistaken in my opinion of him."

"I should n't wonder if you had it about right," said her sister.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE SECRET DIVULGED.

CAREFULLY wrapped in an old shawl that had been her mother's and packed away out of sight in a trunk, Mrs. Loomis kept a relic of her girlhood home — the old family Bible. When, after the death of her parents, this with a few other possessions had fallen to her, even her fast-falling tears had not power to soften her husband's contempt for the Bible, and so she had hidden it away, partly because she could not bear his bitter words and partly because she feared he might destroy it, especially if he suspected that she read it.

The Sabbath following Miss Harper's call, Mr. Loomis went off soon after the midday meal, saying, —

"Carter is going over to Long's pasture to look at his colts, and I am going to ride over with him. I'll be back before dark."

Long's pasture was four miles distant and he was sure to be absent two or three, probably four

or five, hours, but as soon as she saw the two men drive past on their way to look at the colts she settled the baby for a nap and brought out the precious relic. The children crowded about her eager to see the pictures, and, as little Madge laid her chubby finger on the representation of the cradle where the child Moses was sleeping amid the rushes by the riverside, Mrs. Loomis saw the marks which these same fingers had left upon the margin of the leaf.

“O children, we must go and make ourselves clean before we handle the Book! This is God’s Book and we must be clean before we touch it.”

Quickly the hands were washed and then they came back to the pictures. Question followed question, and the mother found the teachings of her childhood not altogether obliterated, so that she was able to tell them many a story from the sacred book. She told them of her early home, of the church and Sunday-school; of the way they used to study the Bible, of the morning and evening prayer; then she spoke of Miss Harper’s visit and the plan for studying an hour every Sunday.

“Mamma,” said Madge, “you said this was God’s book; how did you get it?”

“God gave it to us,” replied the mother rev-

erently; she was not used to speaking the name, and especially it seemed strange to speak it in connection with a gift to herself.

“But you called it Grandpa Stanton’s Bible.”

Mrs. Loomis did not know just how to explain to the wondering children what she meant, but she tried to tell them how God had revealed his will to men by telling good men what to write, and that afterwards it had all been printed so that everybody could have a copy.

They were so excited over the thought that the message was theirs, and so eager to see the pictures, and so anxious to hear the story of each one, that Mrs. Loomis began to fear they would never get settled down to the work of the hour. She could not help casting anxious glances down the road fearing she might be surprised by Mr. Loomis’ coming home sooner than they expected, and before the lesson ended. But the hour had been spent, and the lesson studied with more thoroughness than might have been expected in one so unused to literary effort as Mrs. Loomis. The precious Book was back in its hiding place, and the little girls were asleep when, just at dark, the father returned. Freddy, old and wise beyond his years, seemed instinctively to understand

that it would be just as well not to mention the occupation of the afternoon in his father's presence ; though Mrs. Loomis had thought the matter all over and arrived at a decision. She would make a beginning alone with the children ; if her husband found it out and opposed her, she would be firm ; and maybe after a while he would join them. It did not occur to her that in making a thorough canvass of the neighborhood the Boyntons would in time reach her husband and in that way his opposition would be aroused. But it so happened that two or three weeks passed and neither Louise Harper nor her brother or sister found an opportunity to see Mr. Loomis.

The second Sunday morning Mrs. Loomis' house was unwontedly clean and orderly. A little extra cleaning Saturday in view of the hour with the precious Book had tended to this neat appearance. The children's dresses were washed and ironed, and Freddy's coat had fresh patches at the elbows.

"Do you expect company to-day ?" asked Mr. Loomis as he noted the clean dresses and smoothly braided hair of the little girls, and glanced at his wife, who had on a clean linen collar.

"No," was the reply given to his question. "There is no one to come here that I know of. We are not in the habit of having company, or in a position to entertain visitors if any should come."

"That is so! But you and the girls are so fixed up that I thought perhaps you expected something out of the usual line."

"I used to dress up Sundays, and I thought perhaps it would seem more like old times if we were more particular about our Sunday dress," replied Mrs. Loomis.

There was something in his wife's tone and manner that was different from her usual ways. He was puzzled, but after hanging about the house for an hour or so and finding no solution to the mystery of clean dresses and linen collars he took himself off, much to his wife's relief. And now again the hidden Book was brought out. She had resolved not to set any hour for their study, but to snatch the first hour of her husband's absence. Poor woman! She had been so long accustomed to let herself, her acts not only, but even her very thoughts, be guided by him, that it was hard taking up a line of independent action. It is possible that the way out would have been shorter and even easier had she taken her stand

boldly in the beginning, but it would have required qualities which she had not, at least which at this point were undeveloped in her character. So she did the best she could with her little knowledge and little strength ; not once thinking how her knowledge and strength would increase with the using.

As the weeks went by, it became evident that a transforming power had come into the lives of more than one person in the Boynton Neighborhood, but perhaps in no one was the effect more marked than in Mrs. Loomis. She had lost that shrinking, frightened look which had become habitual ; the shrinking attitude had given place to a dignified self-possession. She had set her feet upon the Rock, and no longer feared the storms which were apt to sweep over her sky. She was growing to be a better housekeeper, home-keeper. The children were neater, the rooms tidier, and the food better served. Mr. Loomis could not help seeing that things were different and yet, strangely, he did not altogether enjoy it. It took away his excuse for being cross and for spending the most of his time away from home.

One Sunday morning he awoke with a raging headache and was forced to remain in bed. Very

tenderly his wife supplied his wants, bathing his head and preparing the daintiest dishes she could with the limited means at her command. He was an exacting invalid, and Mrs. Loomis was sometimes tempted to walk out and shut the door behind her, leaving him to grumble by himself. But though very weary of his exactions she gave no sign of impatience. As the day wore on, the children began to ask about their hour. She had foreseen this and had resolved as to her course. She replied to their questioning:—

“Yes, dears, as soon as your father can spare me, I will come.” Then a little later she said:—

“Now perhaps you can get some sleep if we are very quiet. I will close the door and sit in the other room and read with the children. If you want me, you can speak. I shall hear.”

“No, sit here and read. Perhaps that will make me sleepy. It often does act that way to hear reading.”

“Certainly, if you wish it,” was the ready reply, though the woman’s heart was beating rapidly with excitement. “But the children ask so many questions I am afraid they will disturb you. We can try it, though, and if you get tired of us, you can send us out.”

She brought out the Bible and laid it on a chair, and Mattie took her place on a low stool before it and waited for her mother to give the chapter, for already the children were learning to find the places in the Bible.

"What book is that?" asked the man from the bed in a quick, sharp voice.

"Grandfather Stanton's Bible," was the reply.

"What are you doing with it?"

"Waiting for mother to tell me the place; then we are going to read in it."

"How long since you took up Bible reading?" asked the man angrily, turning to his wife.

"Quite a while. You know it is about the only thing we have to read," was the quiet reply.

"And you are teaching these children that nonsense when you know my opinions?"

"They are my children as well as yours, and you have left their training mostly to me."

"It is your business! It is a woman's business to take care of the family."

"Yes; and lately I have been trying to do my duty by the children. But we ought not to discuss the matter before them. If you please, we will go on with the reading."

He looked at his wife in amazement. He had never heard her speak with so much decision or with so much dignity, and he could but acknowledge that the manner was very becoming, but he was too angry to be influenced by it.

"But I tell you, Anna, I will not allow this."

"I am afraid you will make your head worse. I think it will be better if I take the children out and go on with our reading in the other room or in the yard."

"I tell you — no! I want to know what you are about. Mattie, put away that book! Don't you know it is a pack" —

But Mrs. Loomis had risen and before he could finish the sentence had put the children out of the room; then closing the door she came to her husband's side.

"I will stay with you now if you wish. We will let this matter go for the present. When you are better we will talk about it."

"I don't want to let it rest. I insist upon knowing what is going on in my house. I have suspected for some time that you had a secret, but I never dreamed you had turned pious! Now let's have the whole of it."

"Chad," said the woman, speaking softly, "thus far you have left the care and training of our children to me. Again and again you have told me that it was my business; and it has been very hard for a young, silly girl such as I was to bear such a responsibility; for silly and ignorant as I have been I have felt that it was a responsibility for which I was not equal. But at last I have found out where to go for wisdom and help. Since I began to study God's Word with the children I have found it much easier to manage them. That was my father's book, and he believed in it, and spent his life trying to persuade others to believe in it, and I cannot bear to hear it spoken against. Besides, the children are learning to reverence it, and they must not lay up against their father the memory of such expressions as you were about to use. Chad, I want them to grow up with a love and respect for you which they cannot have if you give them the memory of such remarks. They may not understand now, but they will remember and understand as they grow older."

"Anna, what is the matter with you? Have you turned religious or gone crazy?"

"I have come to my senses, that is all. I think

I was near losing them. I was as near being crazy as ever a woman was when Miss Harper came and put in my way something to take my mind from my troubles."

"Troubles! What troubles have you had I should like to know?"

"Never mind now. This will make your head worse;" and she would have closed the conversation, but he would not have it so.

"I insist that you answer my question. I want to know what your troubles have been. I have a right to know what you have been keeping secret from your husband. Now let 's have it."

When driven to it the woman spoke :—

"Chad Loomis, do you think it happiness for a woman to live on this crossroad out of sight of a neighbor's house, in constant fear of tramps, with no one to speak to for days together except the children, and they all day at school; you crawling out in the morning, sometimes going away without speaking a single word; often not saying anything for days together beyond making known your commands about family matters; never telling me anything about things outside home; with no newspapers and almost no books in the house and never a chance to go anywhere? A

woman with her thoughts going around and around in the little circle of cooking, washing, and scrubbing, unless her mind is as narrow as her outside life to begin with, will go insane or die! I wonder I did not sooner think of my father's Bible and of his God!"

"Well, I declare! Quite a speech! You have come out in a new character. But see here—you will do as you choose, I presume, about reading the Bible, but I will not have you teaching such trash to the children. You understand, I forbid it!"

She made no reply, but the firm expression on her face did not look like submission.

"I say, do you understand?" almost thundered the man, forgetting his pain in his excitement.

"I think I understand your command," was the quiet reply.

"Well, see that you obey!"

"You must be quiet. Let me bathe your head," rising to carry out the suggestion.

"No, I want nothing of you except your promise to do as I tell you. Will you promise?"

"I will not promise. I have rights as well as you, and I owe something to my children as well as a duty to you. I know that I am a better

housekeeper, the children are better behaved, and you find things more comfortable at home since this new influence came into our lives ; and these things ought to have weight with you. I tell you it has saved me from insanity, and, Chad Loomis, I believe that if I had gone crazy, I would have killed the children and myself ! Now you know the whole — and you cannot wonder that I refuse to promise obedience to your unreasonable command. The Lord and the world and the children themselves and even you will hold me responsible for the future of the family, and I must do what is set before me to bring them up right. I am sorry you are displeased. I will put off the reading for the present and try to make you more comfortable."

Without waiting for a reply she stepped into the other room, carrying the Bible with her, saying, —

"Freddy, your father needs me, so you may look at the pictures by yourselves, and perhaps later we can study together."

Mr. Loomis was really too ill to use physical force, else the struggle might have been prolonged, and he would probably have been the victor for that day at least. He had exhausted

himself in his excitement. His remarks had not been rendered in the mild language in which I have chosen to set them down, but were interspersed with expressions which were remarkable neither for refinement nor regard for the Third Commandment, and which showed more excitement than I have been able to portray. He sank back wearily upon his pillow and was obliged to submit to his wife's ministrations. Very gently and patiently she administered such remedies as she could command, and after a weary time he sank into a slumber. It was near evening when she slipped out and joined the children.

"We have been all over the lesson by ourselves," said curly-headed Madge, "and now we can teach it to you."

"I am very glad, for I am tired. Now Freddy can ask the questions, and you and Mattie can give the answers, while I will only have to listen."

"Does n't father like to have us do this?" asked Mattie, suddenly recurring to the scene in the bedroom.

"You know he is sick to-day and he hardly knows what he is saying," replied the mother, anxious to cover her husband's faults.

"But he does not believe the Bible; I heard

him say so," said Freddy. "I knew all the time he would scold us if he knew what we were doing Sundays. But I don't care. Mother believes it and she wants us to study it and I am going to if she wants me to, for she is good to us and father is cross."

What could this wife and mother say? How should she be true to herself and faithful to her children and at the same time teach them to honor their father? Perhaps she was wise in saying nothing but directing attention to the lesson study.

The next Sunday Mr. Loomis stayed about until afternoon; then he said, taking his hat and going out:—

"Come, Freddy, come with me."

"Where?" asked the boy.

"Oh, not far! I am going to take a walk. Don't you want to go?"

"I don't care about it," replied the boy shyly.

The man urged and the boy cast an appealing look towards his mother, who, thus appealed to, asked:—

"Chad, where are you going?"

"Well, I don't choose to tell, but I want the boy. I do not intend to leave him here to be

filled with your nonsensical piety. I suppose you will bring up the girls as you please, but I am going to have my way with the boy. Come on, Fred!"

As the boy still hesitated the father grew angry and said sharply:—

"I don't care what you want! It is going to be what I want!"

At last Freddy whispered to his mother: "I think I'd better go. But I promise you I will not do anything you would not like, if I can possibly help it."

Mrs. Loomis went into the little bedroom and shut the door upon the wondering little girls; and I am not sure that it was not her first real prayer that she offered up then in her agony, asking that God would watch over her boy and keep him safe and pure amid the evil, and that her husband might be brought to realize what he was doing. Then she went over the lesson with the little girls. Mr. Loomis went no farther than Mr. Carter's, and the two men sat on the piazza and drank hard cider and talked politics, for already the excitement of the fall campaign had begun and had even reached this remote neighborhood. Presently Mrs. Carter came to the door and said:

“Freddy, you will find the children down under the big butternut.” Then, turning to Mr. Loomis, she added: “Our new boy is quite a genius. He has fitted up seats under the old butternut on the Lee line, and the children spend half their time there.”

Freddy only waited for his father’s nod of approval, then with eager feet sought out the group under the tree. Of course he found them busy with the lesson, and Miss Lee and Miss Colburn there!

His mother’s eyes were red with weeping when they reached home, but when Freddy found an opportunity to tell his story she smiled and said:—

“We will thank our heavenly Father for managing this, and we will pray all the week that he will manage next Sunday for us.”

## CHAPTER VIII.

"IF THE LORD BE GOD."

DURING these weeks Karl Winchell had seen his mother and grandmother busy over the Bible study every Sunday afternoon. Indeed, so absorbed had Mrs. Winchell become that she had quite given up her Sunday drive, and Bible dictionaries and commentaries were taking the place of the novels over which she had been accustomed to linger. As Karl watched the effect upon his mother and saw something of what was going on in other homes and other lives he looked on less indifferently and more curiously. One morning he met Louise Harper as she was returning from a call. These two had met often and grown to be very friendly, but religious topics had been studiously avoided since that first meeting. Louise was wont to say: "I never enter into an argument. I don't like it, and unless I am dragged into a controversy I keep out of discussions, though I mean always to stand by the truth and to be able to give a reason for my beliefs."

To her sister she had remarked: "If Mr. Winchell ever comes to a knowledge of the truth, it will not be because he was argued into it, but only as the Holy Spirit sends home some truth. If he only could be persuaded to give the Bible a chance!"

That morning as they exchanged greetings a sudden impulse made her ask:—

"Mr. Winchell, how much do you know about our Bible?"

"Not much; but all I care to know," was the reply carelessly spoken.

"It seems very strange that you should not care to know about a book that sways such a multitude of people. If its power and influence were only a local matter; if only a few people believed it and followed its teachings; if its influence reached only a single class, or if it were not an elevating influence; if the tendency of those under its power were downward instead of upward,—I could better understand how you might ignore it; but, as it is, I do not see how a young man with your claims to education and culture can be satisfied to remain in ignorance of a book that plays so important a part in the affairs of this world—unless, indeed, he is afraid of it."

"But why should I waste my time over a book which I do not believe to be true?"

"To discover the secret of its power," was the prompt reply.

"Doubtless its power, as you are pleased to term it, lies in the superstition of the people rather than in the book itself. I acknowledge that it is a very cunningly written book, but from what I know of it — which, as I told you, is not a great deal — it has very weak points, and it is because the world is full of superstitious and credulous people that so many have accepted it as the truth."

"What is truth?" asked Louise.

"Anything that is certain; a fact; a principle proved."

"Very well. I think I have heard you acknowledge a God, a Creator."

"Yes, I am not an atheist!"

"Well, here is a Bible truth — one which you must accept: 'He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand.' That is Bible, and it is experience."

"Well, what does it prove?"

"Simply that so much of what you are pleased

to set down as unworthy of credence is truth. 'He maketh grass to grow upon the mountains. He giveth to the beast his food.' 'Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was.' That is truth, as you will acknowledge. But here is the rest of it: 'And the spirit shall return unto God who gave it;' and that you are not sure about! You want to cut that truth right in two and reject what does not suit you."

"I do not deny that there are some lines of truth in it. It is, as I just remarked, a cunningly written book" —

"And who wrote it?" asked Louise, as he hesitated a moment.

"Well, I am not prepared to say" —

"So I thought. Now see here, Mr. Winchell, you are condemning that of which you really know very little, even as to its origin; a book which exerts a greater power in the world than any other agency; a book in which we find this statement: 'The word of God is quick and powerful' — a statement which is corroborated in your observation."

"But I assure you, Miss Harper, I am willing to admit there may be some truths in it, and that is one reason it finds so many followers; and I

suppose you will admit the same of the Koran, or even of the Book of Mormon. But you do not receive them as truth and as infallible."

"Suppose I admit, as I do, that your statement in regard to the Koran and Book of Mormon is true, what follows?" asked Louise.

"Nothing, only it leads me to ask wherein consists the superiority of your claims for the Bible?"

"In that it as a whole appeals to reason and common sense, is backed by the Holy Spirit, and in accord with human experience," replied Louise, adding, "I believe you are trying to push me into an argument, and you know how I hate to argue, because I do not understand the art. But I want to ask you what makes Christian nations differ from these others that are influenced by the teachings of the books to which you have referred? Look at the people who take the Koran as their religious guide, to whom the central truths of our religion are unknown; look at the dark spot in the center of our own Christian institutions, that which calls for the interference of the strong arm of the law. I know of no better argument for the Bible than a look at the contrasts between those who follow and those who reject."

“Then I suppose you class me with Mohammedans and Mormons?”

“No; because while you reject the Bible yourself you still are under its blessed influence, and you are quite willing to take its benefits second-hand. All the sweet and tender graces of life, the refinements and the chivalry that flourish most in Christian lands surround you, and yet you deny that the progressive spirit of the age, the power that uplifts humanity, emanates from the Bible. I just wonder what you think the world would be without it, and if you would care about staying here long.”

Miss Harper turned to resume her walk, adding as she did so, “I still think that the real reason why you will not investigate for yourself is that you’re afraid of the Bible. You hate some of the truths and doctrines it teaches and some of the duties which it enforces, and you are afraid you will be convinced of its truth.”

Mr. Winchell detained her :—

“See here,” he said; “if you will take such a scapegoat as you seem to consider me, I will join your club or whatever you call it! I want to prove to you that I am not afraid. Will you take me in?”

"Certainly; we take any one who will promise to comply with the regulations. I have some copies of those with me, and we can make you a member at once if you choose."

She seated herself upon a great boulder which had done duty for generations as a wayside resting place, and handed the young man the membership card.

"I see there is nothing in this pledge about praying," he said, speaking lightly. "I always supposed that praying and psalm-singing went with Bible reading."

"We do not object to your putting it in," said the girl, "and we expect it to follow. But, my friend, you should know that this scheme has not been evolved and developed up to this point without much prayer."

"And now I suppose you will turn the batteries upon me as the latest outpost of the enemy to be taken!"

He spoke sneeringly and Louise made no response. She never answered a sneer; she did not consider sneers as arguments, or indeed as having to do with the subject. She said, rising to go:—

"I will send you the topics and the exposition

of the lesson. I hope you will find next Sunday's lesson study interesting."

The young man looked after her, with a curious smile on his really cultured face, and exclaimed : —

"I'm in for it! If she had not taunted me with being afraid of a pack of fables which she considers truth, I would not have been such a simpleton." Then as he studied the card which he had signed he added : "I imagine that I shall serve a notice on that secretary as soon as Miss Harper leaves the neighborhood. I presume I can stand it for a few weeks."

"If the Lord be God, follow him : but if Baal, then follow him." It seemed a little remarkable that to Karl Winchell, beginning the study of God's Word with sneers on his lips and hatred in his heart, the first words of the sacred volume to meet his eye should be those of the Golden Text of that August Sabbath.

Louise Harper said to her sister : "I almost wish the lessons for this quarter were in the New Testament. It seems to me that there is that in the life of Christ that would sooner reach the heart of a man like Mr. Winchell."

"If I were you, I would n't worry about that,"

replied Mrs. Boynton. "And if I had been set to pick out a passage which should impress such a caviling young fellow as Karl Winchell, I could not have selected one which would seem to suit the case better than next Sunday's lesson. Think of it, Louise — what the religion of Baal was — what it is to-day! It is the religion of the world; the religion that gives liberty to gayety and fashion. Its gods are many and various, and, if I am not mistaken, Mr. Winchell has several that he worships. We must pray that he may see the truth through this very passage."

With the reading of that Golden Text there began a conflict in the soul of Karl Winchell — a conflict with the Word, sharp and fierce. It was not over in a day nor in a week, though it began with the reading of that passage which became to him indeed a two-edged sword. He had indeed — how plainly he saw it now — been serving false gods. In his heart he had built unto them altars and temples and had worshiped at their shrines and burned incense before them. He had elevated his intellect, his wealth and his social position, into the place of gods, glorying in them and making everything in his life bend to them. That he might gain time for study and reading how often

did he ignore the claims of filial love and filial duty, leaving his invalid mother and blind grandmother to hours of loneliness while he pored over his books in the library! How for the sake of increasing his wealth had he set aside a principle which his father had been strict to observe, and the broad acres of vines which brought to him great gain had become a part of the great liquor interest of the country! And in his pride of social position, how had he forgotten to hold out a helping hand to his neighbors; how little had he let his sympathies go out to those in loneliness, perplexity, or privation!

To Karl Winchell there had as yet come no time of famine, no drought in which the pleasures of life were as dry fountains. His soul had not been scorched by disappointment. It seemed as though every outward circumstance of life were very much as he would have it, and up to the hour when the Word of God entered his soul these gods of his own setting up had seemed all-sufficient. But all at once there came a suspicion that these things might be false, that they were incapable of standing the test. Was there something better than the life he had been living? Was there, after all, something in the religion of Christ?

## CHAPTER IX.

“HOW LONG HALT YE?”

IF the Lord be God, follow him : but if Baal, then follow him.” Faithful to his pledge, Karl Winchell studied carefully the wonderful word-picture presented in the eighteenth chapter of First Kings. It grew upon his imagination ; he had never before realized anything of its grandeur. As a child he had been told the story, but it had faded from his mind, so that the representation was new to him. He seemed to hear the voice of the prophet, clear as a silver bell, yet emphatic as a roll of thunder : “If the Lord be God, follow him : but if Baal, then follow him.” In imagination he saw the altar which the prophets of Baal had built and the slain bullock laid thereon, and he heard the monotonous repetition of the prayer, “O Baal, hear us!” from morning even until noon, and continued until the time of the evening sacrifice, a repetition which seems to have become a frenzied howl ; he saw them circling about the altar with wild prayers and violent

bodily contortions, and he felt the silence, than which there was no other answer. And as he realized the terrible need of the people, there came to him a sense of the barrenness of his own life.

Even as the heavens above Carmel's slope were like brass; even as the plains round about were scorched and yellowed by the long-continued drought; so, turn which way he might to find rest for his perturbed spirit, water for the growing thirst of his soul, all had become a desert; and the cry of his heart came back to him as from a dome of brass. There was no answer, though by turns he appealed to his wealth, his position, his intellect, and the pleasures of society — none of these things brought to him peace. He was thirsting. Hitherto he had found satisfying springs in these enjoyments of the world; at least he supposed they were satisfying; he had never known how scorched and dwarfed his life really was! He had faith in the power of the Baal he worshiped to give happiness. Indeed, it seemed to him that all which made life worth living was on the side of Baal. Could he throw aside his boasted belief that the Bible was a book of fables? He supposed himself thoroughly intrenched in his belief, or rather unbelief.

In his college days he belonged to an Ingersoll club and had spent much time in elaborating his arguments on the side of infidelity. Were all these carefully wrought out theories to be upset by the contemplation of an imaginary scene? He told himself that it was the dramatic element in the story that had taken hold of his imagination so forcibly that he could not rid himself of what seemed like a conviction of its reality. Again and again he told himself that he was very foolish to spend his time in studying what he did not believe — still it might be worth while to know for himself what the book contained. If this were a specimen, it was without doubt a very remarkable collection of ancient literature. Moreover, he had pledged himself, and, however distasteful the fulfilling of the pledge might be, considering the circumstances under which the promise was given, he would not like to ask to be released so soon; and so he returned to the contemplation of the text. There was continually before his mind a new version which read, not "If the Lord be God, follow him," but "If this Book be true, acknowledge it and follow where it leads"; and for "But if Baal be God, follow him," read: "But if your belief be correct, then follow it."

As if to put his theories to the test he took a sudden resolution. An invitation to join a party of young men, some of them old college friends, on a yachting trip had been almost declined. I am not sure whether or not the pleasure he took in Miss Harper's society and the desire to be near her had anything to do with the letter of regret which he had written; however that may have been, on his way to post the letter he changed his purpose and determined to accept. He said to himself that he must get rid of these haunting thoughts of the old prophet and the test and the fate of the priests of Baal. He told himself that he had kept so closely at home, so shut away from society, that the springs of life were either clogged or dried up, and he must get out into the world — his world — where the streams of pleasure flowed freely. No wonder it looked to him as though life was very barren; no wonder he was thirsting — the wells of life were beyond his reach; he would go to the fountains and drink deeply. Acting upon this thought, he made hasty preparations and entered upon a round of gay pleasures. Would the god at whose shrine he bowed hear the cry of a thirsting soul?

"Where is Winchell?" asked one of the party.

It was Sunday afternoon at the watering-place where they were spending a few days before starting upon the yachting excursion. The carry-all had been ordered for a drive, but Karl was missing when a merry group gathered upon the piazza of the hotel ready for starting.

"I can tell you where he is," replied another of the company. "He is in his room studying his Bible!"

A loud laugh, indeed a full chorus of laughter, greeted this announcement.

"What nonsense!" exclaimed the one who had first spoken. "Tell us something that has the appearance of truth."

"I have told you the truth."

Much good-natured contradiction followed, until at last one of the ladies suggested, "Why not send some one to see? That will be a quicker way of settling the matter."

Earlier in the day, when Karl heard of the plans for the drive, he asked himself what course he should pursue. He had no intention of breaking his promise; you see he had not yet learned that a summer outing absolves one from promises of that nature. He did not realize the fact that many Christians are accustomed to shut up their

religious enthusiasm in the closed churches at home. With him the only question was how to explain his refusal to accompany the party. Should he say he had letters to write? Or would he excuse himself on the plea of weariness and the need of rest? He would do neither. If he was anything, he was straightforward; so he told himself. He did not mind in the least saying to his friends that he had entered upon a systematic study of the Scriptures, but it might seem silly to those who did not know the circumstances, and especially to those who did not know Miss Harper, that he should feel obliged to take for this study a certain hour of a certain day of the week.

Then he smiled at the thought. If he were reading German or Italian, he would not think it at all strange to decline an invitation which, if accepted, would interfere with his plans for systematic study. Where was the difference? He was seeking for knowledge as certainly as though he were studying any of the sciences. Was he? What was his motive? He had begun it in answer to what he was pleased to consider a challenge, but in truth he was becoming interested and desirous of knowing more of what he still termed a wonderful collection of ancient literature.

The result of his self-questioning was that when young Austin came to his door to ask if he would join them he said simply : —

"I am sorry, Austin, but you will have to excuse me this afternoon. I cannot very well go. I have something else on hand."

Austin eyed very closely the books and papers scattered about, and withdrew to make the statement which had called forth the surprised contradictions. The second messenger burst in unceremoniously with the question : —

"Say, Winchell, whatever is the matter that you are not going with us? We are waiting for you."

"You need not wait. I sent my regrets by Austin. Did he not deliver the message?"

"Why, he said you were not going, but he also made the absurd statement that you were reading the Bible; and, feeling sure he was mistaken there, we doubted him in regard to the other part of his story."

"But you see he was correct in both particulars. I am reading or rather studying the Bible, and I beg to be excused from going with you."

"This is extraordinary! Have you turned pious — priest or monk, which is it?"

"I have not turned," replied Karl, laughing at the other's bewilderment. "You must not keep them waiting. If you will have it explained, you'll have to wait until another time. I really am not going."

"It is quite too enormous for me," said the messenger as he rejoined the waiting party. "He won't go, and he *is* reading the Bible. That is all I know about it."

"Dear me! I hope Winchell is not going to spoil our fun by this new freak. I thought he was gayer than ever this season, and I cannot understand this," remarked one of the young men as they drove away from the hotel.

The young lady who sat opposite the speaker in the carryall looked very grave but made no response, and the young man continued in the same strain, still without eliciting any reply. Presently he said:—

"Miss Armstrong, what is the matter? Are you disconsolate at Mr. Winchell's desertion? I think myself he has shown very poor taste in foregoing the company of these ladies for the sake of a musty Bible!"

"Excuse me, but I wish you would not speak in that way of the Bible."

"Why not, pray? I presume it is ancient enough to merit the adjective to which you object."

"Because, though you may not regard it as sacred, you should have respect for the opinions of those who do so regard it."

"Then I suppose I should hold the Book of Mormon in profound respect?"

"I did not say 'hold in respect.' I referred to your manner of speaking, and I am sure that if I were speaking to a Mormon, I would not sneer at his book, though, if I had sufficient knowledge, I might try to show him its absurdity."

Underneath the half-serious talk which they carried on, and in the pauses, Miss Armstrong's thoughts were in a whirl. Karl Winchell, an avowed infidel, spending the hour with the Bible; and she, a professed follower of Christ, dishonoring him and disregarding the command to keep the Sabbath holy! The accusing thought had come to her when Mr. Austin made his first announcement regarding Karl's employment, but she at once realized her position. If she remained at home, how quickly the others would jump to the conclusion that she was piqued over Karl's desertion and unwilling to go without him. She had not courage at the moment to face this.

There were circumstances which made the thought peculiarly annoying. For several years it had been understood in their circle that Helen Armstrong and Karl Winchell would some day marry, though no formal engagement had been announced, and indeed there was none. Away back in the days of the war Mr. Armstrong had saved the life of his friend Colonel Winchell, and later both had expressed a desire that the bond which drew the two families together might be strengthened by the marriage of these two only children. However, by the terms of her father's will, Helen was to be free until she was twenty-one. She and Karl had grown up together and were the best of friends. What either of them thought about the plans of their parents no one knew. Only once Helen Armstrong had been heard to say that she would never marry an infidel. Perhaps she remembered this remark and thought that for once she was worse than an infidel. A mile out on the road they were going was a chapel where in previous summers she had been a helper in the Sunday-school. But this season she had been drawn into this gay circle and had not once been near the chapel. Passing over the familiar road, she recalled the quiet,

peaceful hours she had spent with Christians in that homely place, and suddenly her courage arose. What did she care for what her companions might think or say? Her conscience was awake now and she resolved to obey its promptings. There came a favorable opportunity in the course of the conversation and she took advantage of it to say:—

"I know nothing of Mr. Winchell's new departure. It is as new to me as to any of you, and I doubt if it is anything more than a freak or the payment of a wager; yet it may be that he is acting from some new impulse that has been given to his life."

"We have seen nothing in the last few days to indicate anything in that direction!" said her companion with a slight sneer.

Miss Armstrong felt she was not getting on very well, and they were fast nearing the chapel. Again she began:—

"I do not know what you will say, but the truth is, my conscience is not clear on this matter of Sunday driving. This conversation has opened my eyes as to my duty. I am a church-member, and my place this afternoon is at the little church on the corner. There are so many of you that I

shall not be much missed, and I am going to ask the driver to let me out at the chapel. I have often walked both ways, so I can easily walk back, and you need not change your plans about going back another way."

Protests were vain, and at last one of the other young ladies exclaimed: "You may as well all save your breath! If Nell has made up her mind on a question of conscience, that ends it."

When the party reached the hotel again they found Mr. Winchell sitting upon the piazza.

"Do you know if Miss Armstrong has returned?" asked one of the gentlemen.

"Yes; she came in a few moments since and I think went directly to her room."

Turning to the driver the questioner said: "It is all right; you will not have to drive back for Miss Armstrong."

That young lady came down to tea and sat for a while on the piazza, neither seeking nor avoiding the rest of the party. She declined Mr. Winchell's invitation to go out rowing, saying, —

"Excuse me, Karl, but you know that until this season I have never been accustomed to go out rowing Sundays, and I have decided not to do so any more."

"Helen, were you angry because I did not go this afternoon?"

"Not in the least. I was surprised at the reason given, and I confess I do not understand it yet!"

"I presume not. I will explain to you sometime. I don't care if the others do puzzle over it a little. But see here, Helen, I do not want to sail under false colors with you, and I may as well say that I am just the same scapegrace, and my views are just the same, even if I do sometimes read the Bible."

She looked keenly at him. Did she detect just a tinge of insincerity in his tone?

He knew he was not telling the whole truth; that while he still held on to his old theories, they were not holding him. He seemed to himself to be reaching out after something which was slipping away from him.

The company observed that he was even gayer than usual. Mr. Austin remarked that "Winchell's afternoon employment must have been rather exhilarating."

Karl Winchell was the liveliest person on the yachting excursion, from which he returned in time for the August races. He seemed deter-

mined to take in every form of pleasure consistent with his ideas of morality and his social position. Returning from the excursion, he found a letter informing him of large pecuniary gains growing out of some long ago investments which had been supposed to be unprofitable. It would seem that never had the altar to Baal been built so high, never had he called so loudly, and never had it been so evident to him that there was "no voice nor any that answered."

Returning home at the end of a fortnight, he realized that he had not been able to rid himself of the harassing question, "How long halt ye between two opinions?"

The question was still clamoring for decision when one day he met Chad Loomis shambling along the dusty road. Chad was smoking an old clay pipe and his whole appearance was disreputable in the extreme. As he was passing, Karl suddenly remembered a piece of work which his neighbor had begun several weeks before which was still unfinished. He drew the rein that he might interview the man in regard to completing the job.

While they were talking, Mr. Boynton and his sister-in-law passed, bowing cordially. Karl lifted

his hat in response, while Mr. Loomis just nodded without even removing the pipe from his mouth. Then Mr. Loomis said:—

"Sam drives a pretty good horse. What luck that fellow has! Everything he gets hold of shines like silver. I ought to be as rich as he is to-day, and I would be but for my miserable luck. But then three rich farmers are enough for our neighborhood; you and Boynton and the Halsteads seem to have a monopoly now. Four of us might be more than enough—we would sort of ride over the rest, you know. It is a good deal of trouble to take care of money anyway and I don't complain. Air and water and the landscapes are free. I reckon I get about as much out of life as any of you."

Then as he looked after the receding carriage and its occupants he added, with a peculiar laugh which was very disagreeable to Karl in that connection:—

"Say, Karl, has that fine young woman yonder been after you with her Bible-reading pledge? Pretty slick scheme, is n't it? And a good many fell into it. She got my wife and young ones into it, and though they were pretty sly about it, I found it out and I told them I would n't have it.

But a fellow can't spend all his time watching to see if his orders are carried out. Anyway, they don't dare do it when I'm around. And I reckon she will find a few of us are too knowing to be caught, eh? Why, you know a good many of the folks that have pretended to believe the Bible, and some who have been preaching it for years, — real smart men, — come out now and say it is n't all true, and that God did n't tell the prophets, as they call them, just what to write, but only gave them ideas which they fixed up to suit themselves. I think our theories about it are quite as likely to be correct — that it was just made up out of man's head and is just like any other book of fiction."

Now this talk was exceedingly distasteful to Karl Winchell, though why it should be might not have been easy to explain. He had frequently indulged in a similar strain, only rather more elegantly expressed. Indeed in the college club, to which reference has been made, much was made of the very thoughts Mr. Loomis had just advanced. But there had suddenly arisen before him a marked contrast. This unkempt, uncouth man denied the Bible, scouted at the idea of inspiration, and declared there never was such a

person on earth as Jesus Christ, putting far away from his thoughts and from his life the precepts of the Christian religion — and what a failure he was making of life! The man who had just passed, prosperous, earnest, true, a gentleman in every thought and deed, was a believer in the things which the other denied. Did this fact make the difference? Running over his list of acquaintances, he found other equally marked contrasts. Had belief or unbelief anything to do with the diverse characters of these persons whom he set one over against the other?

Thinking this over as he drove along after rather abruptly closing his interview with Chad Loomis, he remembered that Mr. Boynton was brought up that way. He had always been a gentleman, and he said, talking to himself: "Now if Chad Loomis should get it into his head that the Christian religion is true, and should turn about and become a new man, I would give in and acknowledge that the Bible is not only true but that it has a power in it beyond any other printed page. But what a wild sweep of fancy! I would as soon think of a trip by rail to the moon as of Chad Loomis being anything but Chad to the end of the chapter!"

## CHAPTER X.

### LISTENING FOR CHARIOT WHEELS.

I WISH to take my readers into two or three other homes, the then five or six families introduced must stand for the Boynton Neighborhood, though there are twenty-five or thirty families within the radius of a mile and a half from the schoolhouse, which in most country districts is taken as the center.

The Wilsons lived in a tumble-down house, almost a hovel, on a byroad. They were the most miserable, the most abjectly poor of all the poor people in the vicinity. When I tell you that the head of the family, known everywhere as "Old Joe Wilson," was a drunkard, nothing need be added to give you an idea of the misery of that home. Miss Harper had several times visited the place and had tried to find a way to the mother's heart, but was repulsed at every turn. The woman said: "We don't want no help;" "We don't want folks spying around;" "Folks with dainty clothes and kid boots better not come here where

it is n't fit for pigs to stay!" She owned they were poor, but they "warn't no show nor a circus that folks need come to see them." "No, we hain't got any Bible; if we had, Joe would sell it for whiskey;" and "I never had any time for reading, and I don't care about reading; I don't know anything about God and I ain't sure there is a God; if there is such a being as good folks tell about, I wonder why he lets folks have such a hard time;" and "I don't suppose life would go any easier or Joe would come home sober any oftener if I took to reading the Bible;" and "anyway, Joe would n't let me if I wanted to."

But one of the children, a boy of ten, had promised, and Louise took great pains in her selection of picture papers and cards and lesson leaves for Robbie Wilson. And, fearing the boy might be discouraged at the outset, she said:—

"If you would like it, you can come over to Mr. Boynton's and study the lesson with me for a few Sundays—that is, if your mother is willing."

"Oh, she won't care! She never cares where we go Sundays or any day."

It was the very next Sunday afternoon, as Louise came out to the front porch with the books and papers for their afternoon study and waited

there, looking off over the sunny landscape, until her sister and brother should be ready, that her attention was drawn to some object behind one of the large trees on the lawn. She was not long in discovering that it was Robbie who every few moments peered out from his hiding place. A fit of shyness had overtaken him, but he was reassured by Miss Harper's cheery call:—

“Come, Robbie, we are almost ready; or shall I come out there?”

Turning to her sister, who had just then appeared in the doorway, she said:—

“I think I will go and talk to Robbie for a while. You and Samuel can go on without me. He will not be interested in our talk.”

So it happened that out under the trees that afternoon Robbie Wilson had his first introduction to religious truth; heard for the first time a Bible story. Eager and interested, he listened intently while Louise told the wonderful story of the prophets of Baal, the prophet of the Lord, the altars, the prayer of Elijah, the fire from heaven. Now and then he asked a question which made it certain to Louise that she must tell the story in very simple, everyday language if she would be understood, for this untutored boy knew

absolutely nothing of Scriptural language, nor of the ancient people, the subjects of the remarkable history which, heard now for the first time, held the listener spellbound. To his dying day, aye, doubtless through all eternity, Robbie Wilson will remember that August afternoon and the glowing face of Miss Harper and his first Bible lesson! Were you to ask him to-day what event in his life thus far had influenced him most, I think he would tell you that the story of Elijah, related to him on a certain summer afternoon by an earnest-hearted young Christian, wrought out a radical change in his thought, purposes, and plans in life — rather it marked the beginning of these, for up to that hour he never had had a plan or purpose for his life. He gained that day several ideas which were of practical use to him. Miss Harper told him that as surely as God answered the prayer of the prophet in sending fire to consume the sacrifice so he would answer now those who put their trust in him. She said :—

“Now, Robbie, if you and I are willing to put our bad habits, our wicked thoughts, our bad tempers, everything about us that is wrong — the things that we like to do or that we have fallen into a habit of doing but which we know are not right — I say,

if we will put all these things on the altar, that is, if we are willing to sacrifice them, to put them away and not do them any more, God will help us ; he will burn them all away out of our lives ! Would n't it be good to have a bonfire of our badness ? ”

Robbie appeared to catch the thought and began to enumerate his bad habits, asking if certain things which he had been accustomed to do were wrong, and ending by saying, —

“ My, won't there be a big pile to burn up ! ”

Miss Harper was away for a few days and did not see the boy for two weeks. When he came again he said : —

“ I 'm awful glad you have got back. I wanted to tell you something and ask you a question. ”

“ That is right. What is it ? ”

“ I wanted to tell you that I did as you said, and put them all on the fire, and they were most all burned up ! I made a little fire on a big stone down in the lot and watched the wicked things burn — I made believe, you know — and it seemed just as though they were right there burning. But, my ! they plague me all the time at home because I don't use swear words any more and because I won't lie about things. It is a pretty

hot fire sometimes for a fellow to stand — I don't mean the one on the stone in the pasture but the inside one. It has n't got through burning yet, because, you see, things keep coming up to put on!"

The tears were in Louise's eyes, and in her heart she was saying, "So soon! so soon! O Lord, I thank thee!"

She took the boy's begrimed hand in her own, and said with a choking voice : —

"Robbie, I am very glad to hear this; now what do you want to ask me?"

"I just wanted to ask if there is n't some way I could put father's whiskey bottles on and have them burned up?"

To one who knew that father, and realized the improbability of his being willing to sacrifice his bottles, the utter hopelessness of the case was appalling. Yet Louise was constrained to say in her heart: "Surely God must reward the faith of this child!"

The Halsteads lived a mile from the Boyntons in the opposite direction from the schoolhouse. Mr. Halstead may be taken as a representative man, at least of one class of the community. Like the Winchells, he owned many broad acres

and had a large bank account. But, unlike the Winchells, the Halsteads had neither the education of the schools nor the culture of travel and society. The house was large and handsome, and, standing upon a hill with roomy barns in the rear, could be seen for miles around. The horses were smooth and sleek, their carriage as shiny as Mrs. Winchell's own; the carpets were as expensive, and the mahogany as rich and heavy as the furnishings of the stone house; but Mr. Halstead and his sons came to the table in their shirt sleeves, and the family hurried through their meals that no time should be lost in the race for wealth. The house had handsome parlors and comfortable appointments throughout, but of books there were none worth mentioning. The children had obtained their scanty education at the public school, and the few books they had used had long since been remanded to the attic or sold to the itinerant tin merchant who took old books and newspapers in exchange for his wares.

Upon Miss Harper's first round of calls in the interest of the scheme for Bible study, she reached the door of the Halstead residence, to be met by Dr. Graves, who said in his gruff yet not unkindly manner:—

"Young woman, my advice to you is to go home as soon as possible. There is a case of scarlet fever here!"

"But do they not need help?" asked Louise, remembering when the scourge visited her own family, and a vision rising before her of fleeing servants and a mother left, so far as human help was concerned, to contend alone for the lives of her children.

"No," replied the doctor, "I am going to send out a nurse this evening. The family agree with me that it will be far better to have a trained nurse in charge than to depend upon the help of inexperienced though kind neighbors. Save your strength for the poor."

This last with a smile and a nod towards the broad, waving fields which told of abundance. Then he added assuringly:—

"The place will be quarantined at once, and every precaution taken to prevent contagion. Now go home."

Thus it happened that it was weeks before Louise was permitted to make the acquaintance of the Halsteads. At length the patient was pronounced convalescent, the house purified and all fear of infection removed along with the

doctor's prohibitions, and one August afternoon Louise sat beside a pale, languid girl several years younger than herself, who seemed very glad to see a visitor.

"It is so good of you to come," said the girl. "It is such a long time since I have seen any one excepting the doctor and the nurse. It is only lately that they have let me come downstairs to sit here with Frank."

There were, as it appeared, two invalids in the house. Only a few days after Estelle was stricken with the fever, Frank, the youngest of the family, had been so unfortunate as to slip and fall from the roof of a barn which he was shingling. A broken leg had been the result of the fall, and he was still confined to his couch, the surgeon having pronounced it a serious matter and enjoined the utmost care and quiet.

"We get so lonesome and so tired of each other," said Frank. "The doctor won't let Estelle use her eyes, and he won't let me use my legs, so here we sit and look at each other!"

"But you can use your eyes for her, and she can go about a little, I suppose," replied the visitor.

"Yes, but I can't do the sort of things girls do

with my eyes. I can't crochet nor knit woolly things. Think of a boy making hairpin edging!"

"But you can read for both of you, can you not?"

"Oh, we are not much for reading — either of us. Besides, we haven't anything to read. It always did tire me dreadfully to read books. Sometimes I read newspapers a little, and once in a while I get hold of a book that I like, but mostly they are dull."

"I am sorry you find them so," said Miss Harper. "You miss a great deal of pleasure. The day your sister was taken sick I came as far as the door on an errand. I was coming to ask you to join several others of this neighborhood in a plan for studying the Bible."

"Oh, my!" It was Estelle who exclaimed. She continued: "Why, they have had Sunday-schools out here, but we never went to them much. It was dreadfully stupid! They always invited us to the picnics — they generally go to the Lake. But I don't care much for the kind of picnics they have. There's no dancing or anything!"

How did Louise Harper ever prevail upon that boy and girl, who confessedly had no taste for

study of any sort, to take up a course of Bible study? I am sure I do not know; I think it was not Miss Harper at all, but the Lord who managed the whole matter. He may have used the magnetism of the young woman's presence, the sweet persuasiveness of her voice, but, however it was, she had, when she left, the names of Estelle Halstead and Frank Halstead upon her list. Reaching home, she remarked to Mrs. Boynton:—

"I imagined I had the people around here pretty well classified in my mind, but I have found a new class this afternoon."

"What do you mean?" asked her sister; "explain yourself."

"Why, just this. The Winchells represent one class, or rather they are one class by themselves; they are wealthy, educated, cultured, but not Christians. The Halsteads, whose acquaintance I have just made, are rich but uneducated and rather lacking in culture. The Loomises are poor and evince a lack of thrift, yet they are intelligent and have some education. The Wilsons are poor and ignorant and kept down by intemperance. The Carters, 'well-to-do,' as the saying is, and just common sort of people—unless I except Lillian, who is rather uncommon;

Cline Eastman is the ambitious, good young man, sure to rise ; then there is Miss Lee, with you and Samuel. Together you make a class, educated, refined, and religious. The rest of the neighbors are all sorts and sizes and don't seem to classify."

Mrs. Boynton laughed as she said : "Not much chance for social intercourse between neighbors, is there ?"

"I should think not !"

Then Mrs. Boynton, speaking more seriously : "But Louise, God's Word will fit into every home and into every heart and give us a common ground to stand upon."

"Yes, if it can find entrance. When I think of Robbie Wilson and the marvelous work going on in his young life, I feel that I have not spent the summer in vain. Robbie told me the other day that he was asking God to make his father willing to let his bottles be burned out. It is strange how that figure of fire and laying things that are dear to us, but standing in our way, upon the altar as sacrifices, has taken hold of the boy's imagination."

"Louise," — Mrs. Boynton spoke with great earnestness, — "I believe that the way is being

opened in the wilderness ; a highway of the Lord is being built, and if the few of us here are faithful, what may we not expect ?”

“Let us be listening for the chariot wheels !” said Louise softly.

## CHAPTER XI.

“BEHOLD, HE PRAYETH.”

WHO will find the places for mamma?”

The question was asked in a faint voice, and those who with sorrowing hearts watched the fluttering breath of the questioner knew it was the anxious inquiry of one whose little life was going out. The struggle with disease was over; the physical forces had yielded and Mattie Loomis was going home. Louise Harper was there, holding the child in her arms, while the poor mother, ceasing her ministrations when she saw that neither medicine nor rubbing and chafing the cold hands and feet could hold back the flitting spirit, in an agony of grief knelt beside the couch. The child repeated her question:—

“Who will find the places for mamma?”

Just then her eyes fell upon her father, who, pale and haggard, sat near by.

“Say, papa, will you find the places for mamma in grandpa’s Bible? I always found the places. Will you do it when I am gone?”

Mattie was her father's favorite child. She had feared him less and been more familiar in her intercourse with him than the other children. If a favor was wanted, she had always been the one to speak for herself and the others. And now in this last hour she fearlessly turned to him to ask that which, if asked at another time, or by one of the others, would have made the mother's heart tremble with fear of the consequences. But the man's heart was very tender in that hour of parting with his beloved. He professed to disbelieve in a future life. Then was this parting final? In anguish of soul at the thought, the father groaned as the feeble voice asked once more :

"Say, papa, will you find the places?"

Louise Harper sent up a swift, silent prayer that the Holy Spirit would minister unto the soul of the man and help him in that softening hour to yield his pride and his prejudices in answer to the appeal of his child. Once again the failing voice gasped :—

"Say, papa, will you?" and the father sobbed out :—

"Yes, darling, I'll find the places."

A peaceful expression stole over the face of the child and she whispered :—

"That is all; now I'll go to Jesus;" and closing her eyes she passed quietly from earth.

Karl Winchell had come in a few moments before, commissioned by his mother to find out if anything was needed that neighborly kindness could supply. He stood in the doorway leaning against the frame, a not unmoved witness of the touching scene. A little later he and Louise stood outside engaged in a consultation.

"Some one will have to take the entire charge here," said Louise. "These people have no idea what should be done and are too much overcome to give any directions."

"I will drive right home and ask mother," said Karl. "Perhaps the better plan will be to bring her down here for a little while. Then you and she can decide what ought to be done. I do not suppose there is much here to do with, nor any money for the necessary expenses. They are not exactly the people to whom one can offer charity, for all they are poor. But I will advance money to give the child a respectable burial, and Mr. Loomis can repay at his convenience."

Mrs. Winchell, with a tender sympathy which her neighbors had never before seen her manifest,

and with a tact which even her son did not know she possessed, made Mr. and Mrs. Loomis feel that it was quite proper that she and her son should take the entire charge of the funeral service. Karl himself drove to the village to bring out Mr. Prentice. It was Louise who strewed flowers over the little casket and attended to the details, such as arranging the seats and bringing out from the bedroom the little round stand and placing upon it Grandfather Stanton's Bible. When Mr. Loomis came into the room and saw that Bible near the head of the casket wherein his darling lay, he bowed his head and gave way to a paroxysm of tears.

"O Miss Harper," he said, "she loved the Book and was forced to study it on the sly for fear of me! How could I have been so cruel? If she could only come back, I would never oppose her in anything."

"But, Mr. Loomis," replied Louise, speaking softly, "she has no need now of the printed message; she has gone into the presence of the Lord and hears his voice."

"If I could only believe as you do! But it is all dark, so dark."

"Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of

righteousness arise with healing in his wings," repeated Louise gently.

"I cannot see it," said the man, turning away.

When the request that he would conduct the service reached Mr. Prentice, he remarked to his wife :—

"I am a little perplexed ; that neighborhood is a stronghold of infidelity, and there will probably be some of the leaders present. Indeed I understand that the father of the child whom God has taken is one of the most pronounced of them all. I have been thinking that this may be my opportunity to present some arguments for the truth."

"Don't do it ; that is, not in the way you mean. Comfort that mother by speaking of the loving Saviour into whose presence the little one has gone. Mr. Loomis has asked you to bury his child. Take it for granted that he expects you to speak from your standpoint of the future life, and let your argument be a hidden one. If once you can get them to dwell upon God's love, their infidelity will vanish. Don't openly attack their unbelief."

"Perhaps you are right," replied Mr. Prentice. And so because of one mother's tender sympathy for another in her bereavement, it was no learned

and elaborated argument for the authenticity or the inspiration of the Scriptures that was rehearsed in the presence of the friends and neighbors who came together to pay the tribute of love to little Mattie Loomis. The simple talk was indeed a powerful argument for the doctrine of immortality, yet there was not a hint nor a suggestion that it was meant to answer a possible objection. It was a very tender, earnest effort to comfort bereaved hearts with thoughts of a reunion and of a blissful eternity in the society of the one who had gone on a little in advance.

As Mr. Loomis listened he said in his heart: "Can this be true — that I shall see my darling again?"

The next day was Sunday and Mr. Loomis absented himself from home very soon after breakfast. Mrs. Loomis was quite overwhelmed by her bereavement, but she had hoped much from the promise given to the dying child, and after all he had gone off earlier than usual. The disappointment sent her to bed with a nervous headache. About noon Mr. Loomis returned. He found Freddy trying to get dinner.

"Mamma's head is so bad I thought I would try to make a cup of tea for her," explained the boy.

Thanks to the thoughtfulness of Mrs. Winchell and Mrs. Boynton there was an abundance of well-prepared food, and everything had been put in order the evening before.

With a handiness and a gentleness that surprised his son, Mr. Loomis set to work and made the tea, while Freddy buttered one of Mrs. Winchell's fluffy biscuits and put it on a plate with a bit of thinly shaved dried beef, and together father and son presented themselves with tea and biscuit before a very astonished woman. It had been so long since Mrs. Loomis had received such attentions from her husband that she could scarcely believe her senses, and I am not sure but the surprise did more towards curing her headache than did the cup of tea. At any rate, the attention soothed her aching heart, and after taking a few swallows of the hot tea and eating a few mouthfuls of the biscuit she said:—

"There, I am better already! I shall get up pretty soon."

"Lie still until Freddy and I get ourselves some dinner and wait on the children," replied Mr. Loomis.

There was milk and bread and cold chicken, besides pie and cake, all ready, so the getting of

their dinner was a very simple affair. Afterwards Freddy brushed up the crumbs, and according to his mother's directions packed the few dishes they had used in a neat pile and turned a pan over them. Then he went into the other room to find his father helping the sick woman to arrange her hair and dress. The Bible had not been remanded to the bureau drawer, but at Louise Harper's suggestion had been left upon the little stand with the Quarterlies beside it. Having bolstered his wife up on the couch with pillows, Mr. Loomis drew the stand nearer to her and, bringing a chair for himself, said :—

“You remember I promised Mattie that I would find the places for you. But it is so long since I have handled a Bible that I am not sure I can keep the promise.” His voice failed and it was with difficulty that he added : “But I'll try.”

And thus it was that then and there family study of God's Word was begun in the Loomis household ! Later Mr. Loomis said :—

“I suppose you wonder where I went this morning. I could not sleep last night. I have not slept an hour any night since Mattie left us, and this morning I walked down to the cemetery, and there on her little grave I renounced my

infidelity and vowed to live a different life. I am as ignorant as one could possibly be of all that belongs to a Christian life, but one single sentence that I learned in my childhood came back to me this morning. I think it is in the Bible, and I said it over and over until the unbelief went out of me. It is this: 'Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.' "

Mrs. Loomis was weeping now, but her tears were for joy. Even so early she could see the light shining through the darkness of her bereavement.

As the days and weeks went by, it was evident to every one who came in contact with him that a great and marvelous change had come over Chad Loomis. One morning he called at Mr. Boynton's.

"Sam," he began, speaking in the familiar way to which he had been accustomed from boyhood, "can you give me a job?"

"Why, yes, I think so. I was wondering this morning where I should look for help. The Bartletts are ripening fast and ought to be picked right away, and then the corn-cutting will come next. You can go at the pears to-day if you like.

I am obliged to go to town, so you will have to work alone this forenoon."

"That is all right! Where shall I find the baskets?"

"In the woodhouse chamber. I'll help you get out the ladders; then I must be off."

Louise sat on the steps at the kitchen door, shelling Lima beans.

"Put in a few extra to-day. Mr. Loomis will take dinner with us," said Mr. Boynton in passing.

"I think I have enough for all the neighbors!" said Louise with a merry laugh. "Norah picked a great many more than we need."

"If you do not need to cook them all, let Mr. Loomis take the rest home to-night." Turning to that gentleman, he added: "Our Limas are unusually fine this year, and we may as well share them with our neighbors. Karl Winchell says his are a failure this season, and I told him to send Mike over for a mess. Louise, if he comes while I am away, let him pick from the farther end of the rows."

With such tact did Mr. Boynton make it easy for his neighbor to accept the favor.

As he came back with the baskets Mr. Loomis paused a moment to speak to Miss Harper.

"Yes, I am going to work for Mr. Boynton

right along. He says he will have work for me all the fall. Miss Harper, I have found out that there are more remarkable things in that Book than I dreamed of. I found where it says: 'If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he . . . is worse than an infidel.' Now I don't want to be worse than I have been, so I am going to try to make my family comfortable—what there is left of them," he added with a tremor in his voice.

"I am very glad for you, and I am sure Mr. Boynton will help you all he can."

"Indeed, I know he will! Sam is as true as steel! I have known that all the while, though I have ridiculed his ideas—but I guess the ideas were about square."

He hurried away to begin the battle—the battle which was not fought out in a day. Mr. Boynton proved a friend in need, ever on the alert, ready with words of cheer, working by his side whenever it was possible, watching for the hours of weariness and discouragement, and changing the work when one sort seemed likely to become monotonous, now and then taking Mr. Loomis' place in the field and sending him off with a horse to do an errand. He realized that

the habits of indolence which had been growing for years could not be broken off in a moment. Besides, he more than half-suspected that the man was physically weak for lack of nourishing food, so he and his wife were careful to give him plenty of the sort which would build up his system and take away the craving for stimulants. Chad Loomis had never been called a drunkard, but he had been accustomed to drinking hard cider whenever it came in his way. His neighbor Carter had always been very ready to set the pitcher before him.

It was remarkable in how many ways Mr. Boynton found it convenient to lend a hand. He had employed a carpenter for some repairs upon the out-buildings. He said to his neighbor:—

“I noticed the clapboards on the east end of your house were many of them loose, and the shingles look broken. Does the roof leak?”

“Well, yes, it does. I have been meaning to fix it these two years back, but have n’t got to it. It must be mended before winter.”

“Yes, I should think so. I was going to say Miller will be done with the job he is at by ten o’clock, and there are some shingles left. You may as well take old Prince and draw them over

with the clapboards that are in the shed, and I will send Miller over to help you. Together you can do quite a piece of work before night. You can drive a nail as well as he can. Put on the new boards as far as they will go."

Later there were some paints left which "might as well go on those new clapboards." And still later Mr. Boynton said:—

"Chad, there is a stormshed packed away in the loft of the cowhouse. I shall not use it now that we have enclosed the side veranda with glass. You may as well get it down and put it up over your door; it will make the house much more comfortable."

Besides these things, Mrs. Boynton was continually saying, —

"Mr. Loomis, will you take this basket of fruit to your wife? We have more than we can dispose of." Or, "I promised Madge a birthday treat. If you will give this to Mrs. Loomis to keep out of Madge's sight until to-morrow, it may save me a walk over there in the morning;" and judging from the weight of the basket Mr. Loomis concluded that there was enough in it for a family dinner, and probably he was not far from wrong. Again she would say: "Louise, if you

are going for a walk this morning, I wish you would take this slice of steak over to Mrs. Loomis. I don't know what Samuel could have been thinking about when he bought so much."

"I presume he was thinking of the Loomises," responded Louise. "He seems to be thinking of them most of the time lately!"

"Well, if Chad Loomis does regain his manhood and become a respectable member of society, he will have something for which to thank Samuel Boynton," said the wife warmly.

"Perhaps not more than Mr. Loomis' wife will have cause to thank Samuel Boynton's wife," returned Louise with equal warmth of manner.

"Oh, it is very little I have done for her compared with what Mrs. Winchell is doing."

"It is quite remarkable the interest that woman takes in her neighbors. Three months ago she professed to be utterly indifferent to the class of people one finds in country neighborhoods!"

"Mrs. Winchell has been drinking at the Fountain," said Mrs. Boynton softly.

## CHAPTER XII.

"GIVE ME THY VINEYARD FOR MONEY."

WHAT is the first thing to be done?"

Frank Halstead asked this question, lying comfortably back upon the pillows of his couch, and turning over the leaves of the question book which Estelle had just handed him. She had brought the large Bible from the center table in the parlor and placed it open upon a small table which she drew near to the open window and seated herself before it. To Frank's inquiry she replied:—

"Why, in the real Sunday-school, I think they read the lesson first; the superintendent reads one verse, then the school reads the next one; they call it responsive reading."

"Well, you can be superintendent and I'll be school; I feel equal to a dozen boys at the least calculation."

"All right!"

Then Estelle began. She was, thanks to the careful training of one of the few good teachers that the district had been favored with, a pleasant

and distinct reader. She read now in a clear voice which fell distinctly not only upon Frank's ear, but also attracted the attention of another and unseen listener.

John Halstead sat tilted back in his chair, leaning against one of the pillars of the veranda just outside the window near which Estelle was sitting. Though only a few years past his boyhood, John had already taken his place as a prosperous business man. He was the namesake of his grandfather and had received from him a legacy which gave him good foundation to build upon. He owned and managed his farm near by while still living at home. Mr. Halstead, the father, had the reputation of being close in a bargain, yet was considered strictly honest; as if a man who habitually robs the Lord of the homage due him could be called honest. But John had already the name of being rather inclined to overreach in business transactions. He was a genial, pleasant young fellow and would have been a favorite among the young people had he not been too much absorbed in money-making to allow himself to mingle often in society. He had not noticed what his brother and sister were saying until Estelle began to

read; then his attention was turned to them, and he heard distinctly the words she read:—

"And Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him: for he had said, I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers. And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread."

What could there have been in the words to call a flush to John Halstead's cheek?

He continued to listen as Frank took up the story and read:—

"But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said unto him, Why is thy spirit so sad, that thou eatest no bread?"

Then again Estelle:—

"And he said unto her, Because I spake unto Naboth the Jezreelite, and said unto him, Give me thy vineyard for money; or else, if it please thee, I will give thee another vineyard for it: and he answered, I will not give thee my vineyard."

Then again Frank, and so on to the end of the story of Naboth, the flush meanwhile deepening upon John's face. At the conclusion of the reading Estelle repeated the Golden Text, "Thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord."

"I suppose we ought to learn that by heart," she said.

"Oh, I know that already!" and Frank repeated the words which seemed to fall upon John's ears like an accusation:—

"Thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord."

"What are those children doing?" wondered John with set lips and burning cheeks. "I should think they were rather too old to be playing church like a couple of babies." But something held him, and he remained a listener all unknown to the boy and girl who were becoming absorbed in their unwonted occupation. Frank asked the questions from the book, and Estelle wrinkled her brows in the puzzled effort to answer, and when she failed Frank turned to the "Quarterly" and found the answer. Presently, disregarding the question Frank had just asked, Estelle said:—

"Frank, does this Naboth make you think of Mrs. Brown and her little house and garden?"

"That's a fact! It does seem a little like her, does n't it? I have heard father and John talking it over lots of times, how obstinate she is about selling because it is the place her father left her.

You see John wants the place for a creamery because there is such a splendid cool spring on the back part of the lot coming out of the hill."

"I know, but there the likeness ends. John would n't do a mean thing to get the widow's land."

"Of course not! I was not thinking of that," said Frank quickly with loyalty to John. "But do you suppose when the king first began to want the place he could have imagined such a thing as that which happened? I suppose he began by wishing he could have it, and the more he knew he could n't get it the more he wanted it and the more it seemed that he must have it either by fair means or otherwise. It says here in the notes that Ahab began by breaking the tenth commandment."

"I remember," said Estelle, "once when I was a little girl Lill Carter had a lovely doll, much prettier than any of mine, and I wanted it dreadfully; finally I persuaded her to trade for a Noah's ark that had n't a whole-legged animal in it. When mother found it out she made me go to Mr. Carter's and take back the doll, and she said I was a cheat. I suppose I began to go

wrong when I wanted the doll, and then I began to plan ways to get it."

John let the legs of his chair drop to the floor with a thump as he called out :—

"Say there ! what are you youngsters about?"

"O John ! are you out here ? Estelle and I have joined something, a society I guess it is ; and say, don't you want to join ? Maybe you could help us about the things that puzzle us."

John seated himself on the low window sill, turning his face from the light to hide the flush which had only partly faded from his face.

"What is it, anyway ?" he asked.

Estelle explained and added :—

"The lesson for to-day is a queer story. The Story of Naboth is the name. I suppose it must be true, though it does not seem as though any one would do such a wicked thing."

"I don't just see what that verse they call the Golden Text means," said Frank.

"Why, don't you understand that ?" exclaimed Estelle. "When any one does a wrong thing for money or for anything else he wants, it is selling himself. I have heard people talk about politicians selling themselves for office, and I suppose

men sometimes sell themselves for money — do real mean things, you know."

"Underhanded, too," said Frank. "Now in this old king's case things seemed all fair, and maybe the people around there never mistrusted that there had been any underhanded work or any meanness. Nowadays there is n't any prophet to tell a man right to his face that he is mean and wicked and that he has sold himself."

Estelle was still a moment; then she said, speaking very earnestly as if the thought was weighted with solemnity: "Why, Frank, is n't there something worse than a prophet? I believe I would rather hear a man telling me to my face that I had done something wrong than to listen to my conscience."

John Halstead arose abruptly and with an expression that sounded like "Bosh!" strode down the walk, crossed the street, and struck off into the fields beyond, and that was the last they saw of him until supper time. Frank, absorbed in the subject under consideration, did not seem to notice anything peculiar in his brother's manner; but Estelle's quick eye took in the expression of his face and her ear caught the impatient tone, and as she watched him in his hasty stride across

the fields she said within herself: "John walks as though he wanted to get away from something unpleasant."

And truly John Halstead would have been glad could he have walked away from the disagreeable thoughts awakened by what he was pleased to term "the idle chatter of two children." He could not deny that they had spoken truly in saying that he was anxious to get hold of the widow Brown's little home for business purposes. Again and again had he tried to induce her to part with the place, offering her more than a fair price, saying he was willing to pay more than any one else would because it would be worth more to him. But Mrs. Brown's invariable answer was in effect this:—

"I do not wish to sell. It is my home and was the home of my parents. The money I would receive over and above the mortgage would not go far toward buying a home elsewhere. I am known to the people about here, and they are all very kind and ready to give me work, which I should not be likely to secure in a strange place. I am not the sort of person to make a new place for myself. I hope to keep up the interest on the mortgage until Charlie is old enough to pay it off.

Besides I think Wilfred will come back some time, and I want him to find his home here."

No inducement which John or his father could hold out had any effect upon the woman; she would not sell her home. The mortgage was past due, but the man who held it was lenient and willing to let it run so long as the interest was paid regularly; but his sudden death and a little manœuvering on John's part had placed that young man in a position to press Mrs. Brown for payment, and, as she was unable to raise the money, he was about to foreclose the mortgage. John was jubilant that at last he was to have the coveted bit of land and the cool spring. Was it strange that the words which fell upon his ear that Sunday afternoon caused a flush to rise to his brow? What stuff was that, anyway? He discovered as soon as he came over to the window that they were reading from the Bible. Did John Halstead believe the Bible? Well, he seldom stopped thinking about money long enough to define his position. His father's creed was that if a man were honest, industrious, and sober, peaceable, and charitable, he was all right. He professed to be a "Golden Rule Christian"; he never took a penny that was not rightfully his

own and always exacted from every one all that could legally be claimed. He sent Mrs. Brown many a joint of meat, basket of vegetables, and load of wood; still he sympathized with John in his desire to get possession of her little home and considered the means by which the desired end was to be gained as perfectly legitimate. The woman was certainly standing in her own light in refusing the good offers which had been made; it would be every way better for her to sell the place; and now it must be sold anyway to carry out the requirements of the law in such cases, and if John were to bid it off, where was the wrong? He had the same right that others had.

John had looked at it in the same light until that afternoon when the story of Naboth had come to him with such a revealing power. He had been shown a depth in his own heart which he had not suspected. He had actually been rejoicing in the series of misfortunes which had overtaken his neighbor; he had even allowed himself to think that the time for generosity towards Mrs. Brown had gone by and that he would be justified in taking advantage of the situation to secure the property at a reduced

price. It would serve the woman right, so he told himself. As to what would become of her, it was no business of his; he and his father had tried to help her and to convince her that she would be better off to let them have the place at a good price, and now she was only reaping the reward of her obstinacy, as he was pleased to call it. Everybody said that having the little notch taken right out just spoiled his farm and that he ought to secure it; he had been congratulated upon the present prospect of getting hold of it, and no one would blame him for using the circumstances as a stepping-stone in reaching the summit of his desire.

He had reasoned in this way, and it all seemed easy and legitimate until that afternoon when a new light was shed upon the question. He suddenly discovered that there were different stand-points from which to view things, and by what was to him a mysterious influence he found his point of observation changed and himself looking at the other side of the question. Had he sold himself to work evil? Had the story of Naboth a parallel right there in the Boynton Neighborhood? In case he carried out his designs with the approval of his father and other business

men, would his own conscience, standing as Estelle had suggested in the place of the prophet, upbraid him with the thought, "Thou hast sold thyself to do evil in the sight of the Lord"? Over on the hill which overlooked his own fair fields as well as the little house and garden in the hollow, lying at full length on the ground under the shadow of an old maple, John Halstead tried to rid himself of these unwelcome thoughts and endeavored to reason himself back into a state of complacency. Would he be able to do this?

## CHAPTER XIII.

### A PARTING.

AS might be expected, Satan was not willing that the advance upon his stronghold should go on unchecked and so put it into the hearts of fathers and brothers and even mothers to oppose the entrance of the gospel and to flaunt the banners of unbelief. Lillian Carter, eager for knowledge, had plunged into the study of the Bible with an eagerness in keeping with the intensity of her nature, and presently Mrs. Carter's opposition was aroused. She stood in the doorway and watched the group coming home from the cabin near the line fence. The younger children were running ahead while Lillian and Cline Eastman walked more slowly and were earnestly discussing one point upon which they were not quite clear as to the meaning. She waited until they came up and Cline disappeared when she began :—

“Lillian Carter, you are quite too big a girl to be spending your time in the company of the

hired boy! It does very well for the younger children, and indeed I am very glad that Cline is fond of children, for really I used to dread having them on my hands all day Sunday. But I am not going to have you, almost a young lady, spending your time in his company."

"Why, mother, I seldom see him except Sundays, and then Miss Lee and Miss Colburn are always there, and the Sundays here at home are so long and lonesome."

"Well, we will fix that! We can find some pleasure in life without Miss Lee's assistance. Anyway, I am going to put a stop to your having to do with the hired help."

"Where is Lillian?" Miss Lee asked the question the next Sunday when Cline and the younger Carters made their appearance at the cabin.

"Ma and pa have gone to the lake and Lill has gone with them," replied the little sister.

"Lill did n't want to go; she cried all the morning, but ma made her go. She said Lill was getting old enough to see things outside this neighborhood."

It was the little brother who volunteered this information, to which the sister assented.

"Yes; and ma said, if they liked it, they would

most likely drive down every Sunday, and she promised me that I might go with them sometimes."

Then the brother had more to say. "Lill took the books along; she said she was going to study so as not to get behind, but she told me not to let ma know."

The following Sunday was fair and bright, but a heavy rain on Saturday rendered the roads unfit for a pleasure drive, so Mrs. Carter was forced to yield to circumstances and allow her daughter to mingle with the group of students. But whenever possible something was planned to prevent the girl making one of the number. Louise Harper lamented this to Miss Lee, but that wise woman replied:—

"My dear, I have been a little troubled about this, but I have just left the child in the Lord's hands. Every time she comes among us she is more eager to know the truth, and I believe that this very opposition is working out for her a blessing. With her nature difficulties will serve to strengthen her purposes. Even now there is a promise of better things for the girl. She has been eager to go away to school, but Mrs. Carter has been violently opposed until a few weeks ago

when a cousin visited them who told, in what Mrs. Carter thought was a boastful way, about his daughter who graduated last year at Wellesley and now has a good position at what seems to people here a princely salary. The consequence is that the way seems to be opening for Lillian to have the advantages she craves.

"I cannot tell you," continued Miss Lee, "how glad I am that you are going to stay among us. Lillian will be one of your pupils for this year. I did not hear of your change of plans until last evening."

"It was only decided two days ago," replied Louise.

"I had thought of it myself, but did not suppose you would be willing to give up your position for anything which could be offered here."

"Of course the position is not nearly so good as the one I have resigned, but my sister seems to need me. The doctor says that being shut in alone so much during the long winters is bad for her, and that if she has company and things outside her home to interest her, she will go out more and that will be better for her. Mr. Boynton says as there are only two of us left we ought to be together, if possible, and he has urged it so

earnestly that I could not well refuse. I presume I shall find the school as good a field for work, if not quite as profitable, as the one I gave up."

"No doubt of that. There's no foretelling what may come of the winter's work. The summer's labor has certainly been crowned with success."

"Yes; we have now about thirty names on our list. That is without doubt a wedge pretty well driven in."

"I am sorry that Cline Eastman is going away; I have grown to have a great liking for that boy."

Cline Eastman had hoped to retain his place at Mr. Carter's, but Mrs. Carter was quite resolved that he must not be reëngaged. It was not a bright prospect that loomed up before the boy as the first of October drew near and he had not been able to secure employment.

"It seems very strange," he said, talking with Miss Lee, "that all my efforts should fail. I have tried to do my very best to please Mr. Carter, and indeed he has never found any fault; but I am turned off, for what cause I do not know, and I have tried to get another place, but here I am, not knowing which way to turn."

"Cline," said his friend, "it has sometimes

happened to me to have to spend a little time in patient waiting while the Lord works out his plan for me."

"That is what mother says. In her last letter she wrote: 'Be ready and waiting; the Lord may not see fit to tell you long beforehand what his plan is for you.' I suppose you and mother are right, but it is n't easy for a boy to look at things that way."

"I know; no doubt your mother, as well as myself, has had to learn the lesson over and over; and the strange part of it is that every one has to learn it for himself; none of us seem to be able to take it second hand."

A week or two slipped away and Cline still wore that downcast look. But one morning he went to say good-by to his friend. He found Rena Colburn under the butternut tree. She was sitting upon the top rail of the line fence watching the little Heslers who were picking up butternuts which had fallen from the tree under the power of the first frost.

Cline leaned against the fence; he had been telling Rena a wonderful story of how the way had opened before him when he thought it was hedged across.



A PARTING.



"Well, Miss Rena, I must say good-by. We have had a pleasant summer; at least the Sundays have been very pleasant to me."

"And to me also. I have enjoyed it all exceedingly. I would not have believed that I could have enjoyed studying the Bible as I have. It is really quite interesting."

"Only interesting, Miss Rena?"

Cline's voice was very low and almost pleading.

"Why, what more would you have me say?" asked the girl.

"I would like to hear you say that you had found in it the greatest blessing of your life. I would like to hear you say that you had taken its truths into your heart to live by, and" —

"Now, Cline Eastman, don't go to preaching! You'll just spoil this perfect day. I suppose you want to practice, but don't, I beg, begin on me!"

Then after a pause, seeing Cline did not speak again, she added: "Where did this uncle of yours spring up from? Only the other day you were talking about the impossibility of getting through college by your own exertions because you thought you ought to help your mother, and here you are with a rich uncle all ready-made."

"Uncle Lyman says he has had a notion come

to him lately that it is a good idea for a man to be his own executor to a certain extent. He wrote to mother that what money he spent upon us — poor relations, you know — would be so much the less for lawyers to quarrel over."

"Well, I am glad for your sake he took the new notion. Cline, don't forget your friends here when you get up to the top round of the ladder."

"Indeed I shall not! Miss Rena, we may never meet again, though if we live and I can bring it about we certainly shall, but I want to thank you for your kindness to 'Carter's hired boy,' and I wonder if you would do me a still greater favor?"

"Why, Cline, you know I would do you any favor I possibly could!"

"Would you? Well, I am going to try you, then; will you write to me sometimes?"

"I don't know any reason under the sun why I should n't," said the girl, "only I make this stipulation — you must not write preachy letters."

He helped her down from her perch and they shook hands; then he sprang over the fence and walked hastily across the field. While she was walking more slowly up the slope toward home she turned now and then for a glimpse of the manly young fellow, who with rapid strides was

putting a distance between them. She thought of this and said to herself: "My, won't he make strides on the road to learning! I never saw a fellow who loved knowledge as he does; but I wonder what brother John would say to my corresponding with 'Carter's hired boy.' Anyway, I'll show cousin Melinda the letters."

## CHAPTER XIV.

“JUST THE THING.”

HOW will we go to church and Sunday-school if Duke is sold?”

A sad-faced woman laid her hand tenderly upon the flaxen head of the young girl who had with great anxiety in her voice asked the question.

“Ah, dearie,” said the woman, “that is the hardest part of it! I fear we shall not get to church or Sunday-school very often.”

The shadow of bereavement was resting heavily upon the home of the Lorings. The husband and father had been called away from earth, and Mrs. Loring was beginning to realize that she must face the world alone, care for and train her children, attend to the details of business, and with careful economy bring their family expenses within the limit of their reduced income; in brief, she must bear the burden which ever falls upon widowed hearts. Of the five children four were girls, the youngest of the group being a boy of five years. As it became necessary to reduce

their establishment considerably, many of their cherished possessions were sold. Especially did the children grieve at the sale of the family horse, but as there was now no one to take care of old Duke the only thing to do was to sell him. And Jennie's pitiful wail was in the heart of every member of the family. Probably the mother felt it as keenly as any of them, but she strove to comfort her children.

"We can walk sometimes, but not often. We will remember to keep the Sabbath holy, and will try to make it a happy day, even if we do have to stay at home."

"Mamma," said Margaret, the oldest girl, "I wish you would ask Miss Harper about something—I don't know what it is—a society, I guess; I heard Lillian Carter and Miss Colburn talking about it that afternoon we were invited to Miss Lee's. She said the Sundays were not nearly so lonesome since she joined. Maybe it is something we could belong to; I am sure it is for people who do not go to church."

"It must be something good if Miss Harper is in it," said Marian, the next younger daughter. "Oh, dear," she moaned, "I shall miss being in her class in Sunday-school!"

"Yes, darling, we shall miss a great many things ; but we must be very brave and not complain, and I am sure some good things will come to us. Your papa thought it would be best for us to stay here for a time. If we decide to live here permanently, I hope that in a year or two we can have a horse again, but for the present we must make the best of everything and not complain because we have to make sacrifices."

Miss Harper missed her little pupil from Sunday-school and very soon came to see her. The Loring's were not exactly in the Boynton Neighborhood as they belonged in another school district and lived on the road to the village two miles or more from Mr. Boynton's.

Learning that Mrs. Loring and her family would not be able to attend church very regularly and probably not at all in winter, Miss Harper instantly thought of the Home Class Department for these "Shut-ins," and once more she unfolded the plan.

"Why, it is just the thing for us ! It seems as though it were planned for our especial benefit," said Mrs. Loring. And Margaret said : "Mamma, this is what I wanted you to ask about."

Mrs. Loring continued : "I have been planning to take up some method of systematic Bible study with my children, but I did not know just how to do it, and here it is all laid out for us. You may put all our names down on your list. It won't seem quite so hard, this having to stay at home from church and Sunday-school, will it, dearies?"

Mrs. Loring and her children grew to look upon the Bible hour, as Jennie named it, as the pleasantest time of all the week. Gathered in their bright sitting room, with the family Bible, their quarterlies, their books of Illustrated Bible Stories, and maps of Bible lands, sometimes the hour was all too short.

Mrs. Loring was a devoted mother ; her thoughts and her sympathies, her efforts and her interest centered in her home. She had never been upon intimate terms with any of her neighbors ; she had considered herself in no way responsible for their happiness or welfare. If there were sickness or need, she was ever ready to respond to a call for help ; but as a rule she gave little heed to matters outside her own household. Better educated than the most of the people in her immediate vicinity, surrounded in her home with

more culture and refinement, she had little taste for society as it existed in that locality. She had in consequence the reputation of being very exclusive, or, as the people expressed it in homely parlance, she was considered as "feeling above her neighbors." The dainty furnishings of her home, the pretty garments which her deft fingers fashioned for her children, her own tasteful dress, the books they read, the magazines and the numerous letters which came through the mail—to jealous and suspicious natures all these things were so many proofs of the oft-repeated statement that Mrs. Loring felt herself superior to the rest of the people of the community.

In the adjoining neighborhood Mrs. Boynton was never charged with this offensive exclusiveness, though in refinement and culture and in literary taste and attainments she was quite Mrs. Loring's equal, if not indeed her superior. Wherein lay the difference? What made the one so popular and the other so unpopular? Mrs. Loring would without doubt at that period of her life have repudiated the charge of selfishness, but herein was the secret! When she said, "It seems as though this plan of study were made for us," she expressed her real self. No thought

of the needs of the community in which she lived came to her; she did not even think of old Mrs. Peters, who, feeble and crippled, had not been able to go to church for years, but who loved the Lord, and to whom the idea of studying her Bible in connection with a large company of God's people would be a great joy. She did not think of other families where there were children, as bright and as precious as her own, growing up without instruction in Scripture truths. She thought only of her dear ones; to them she was faithful and for their interests ever ready to make sacrifices. Selfish? Oh, no! She was willing to spend and be spent for—her own!

But some weeks later all this was brought home to her very forcibly, doubtless by the Spirit of God, though again the starting point was a remark made by Jennie.

"Mamma," said the little girl, coming in from school one afternoon, "Minnie Brown says she does wish she could come to our Bible hour. Don't you think she could? That would n't be Sunday visiting, would it?"

"No, dear"—the reply came slowly and hesitatingly; "it would not be visiting, but do you

think it would be nice to have strangers come in with us ? ”

“ I don’t know ; I was n’t thinking of that. Minnie is n’t just a stranger ; you know she is my seat-mate. I suppose it is nicer to be just by ourselves ; but, mamma, just think, Minnie was never in Sunday-school, only for a few weeks last summer when she was visiting her grandmother ! She says she learned a little about things in the Bible and she wants to know more, but she does n’t understand it when she tries to study it by herself, and she does n’t think her mother cares much about the Bible. Say, mamma, don’t you think we ought to let her come ? ”

Into Mrs. Loring’s mind there flashed the remembrance of the words of her Lord spoken to Peter : “ Feed my lambs ; ” and she wondered a little if she had come to a place in her experience where this injunction fitted in. So strong was the impression that she could not say No to Jennie’s pleading in behalf of her little friend, neither was she ready to yield in this matter, so contrary to her lifelong habits. She replied still as though much in doubt : “ Well, dear, we will see what the rest think about it.”

Margaret said : “ I don’t mind, only if we let

Minnie come, others will want to come too, and so our quiet good time will be spoiled."

"Mamma," said Marian hesitatingly.

"What is it, dear?"

"Well, I can't say it—but if I knew about something that belonged to some one else just as much as to me, and they did n't know about it, wouldn't it be wrong not to tell them? The Bible is n't just ours alone."

Jennie had another little word to say. "We read the other day about putting a candle under a bushel—and is n't that like what we want to do? We want to draw the curtains and not let anybody see the light."

"I suppose it is rather selfish," said Margaret, "and I am willing to let Minnie come, and I won't draw the line at Minnie either."

This was the way a neighborhood class began, for Mrs. Loring, having opened her heart to one outside her family circle, soon found her sympathy going out to others and still others, and presently the neighbors were saying, "What a nice, pleasant woman Mrs. Loring is when one comes to know her!"

By this time the Home Department had become so large that the people were talking about it, and

one member of the church which the Boyntons attended, living in the village, said to the pastor :

“What is this about a Home Department of our Sunday-school?”

“I hardly know myself,” was the reply. “Mr. Boynton came to us some time ago with a scheme that seemed rather unpractical and somewhat quixotic and wanted it endorsed by the official board. Mr. Boynton is generally level-headed, but this seemed so utterly useless, not to say absurd, that I am afraid he and his wife thought us rather unsympathetic. We did give him the privilege of connecting his students with the Sunday-school here in case he secured any, but I have no faith in the practical workings of the plan, and I do not know that anything has come of it.”

“Well, from what I hear there may be a surprise in store for you. I heard the other day that there was a revolution going on out there, and that the whole neighborhood was being uplifted. But I do not understand the plan of work and I thought perhaps you could tell me something about it.”

“Why, it is like this : it is a scheme for promoting systematic Bible study among non-church-goers and identifying the persons so engaged with

the nearest Sunday-school as home students. It sounds well, but the absurdity of supposing that people who do not attend church and are not religiously inclined will pledge themselves to study the Bible does not seem to strike these enthusiasts."

"But there are many people who are religiously inclined who cannot go to church, and I should think it might be a good thing for them."

"Well, you will not find many of that class in the Boynton Neighborhood," replied Mr. Prentice.

"Perhaps not just there. I was thinking of people here in the village who come out to the preaching service and for various reasons cannot stay to the Sunday-school, and some who do not even get out to morning service. There are many of our church members — women with little children — who are kept at home. I think it a fine scheme, and I believe we ought to work it up here in the village. It strikes me that the adoption of the plan generally would give the church a new source of power. It would be a stream of influence flowing into the church, and every now and then there would be permanent additions. It could not help working that way."

"You are simply investing a theory — a fanciful one at that — with results which are not

warranted. I cannot see anything in it. It is not practicable, and we have as a church organization already spent too much money, time, and strength upon schemes that came to naught."

"But, Mr. Prentice, do you not know that this thing is prospering marvelously, right within the sound of the church bell? And the scheme is well worked all the way from here to the Ridge."

"Well worked? Do you suppose that a dozen people have taken up the idea?"

"A dozen! It would be a grand thing to have a dozen; but, my dear sir, I heard yesterday that Mrs. Loring has fifteen in her class, which meets at her house every Sunday."

"Mrs. Loring!"

"Yes, Mrs. Loring. Say, parson, I should n't wonder if it would be a good thing if you would get out among the people a little and find out what's going on. Never mind the sermons for a spell. But, say, isn't it queer you did n't hear about this work the day you went over to Chad Loomis' to attend the funeral?"

"No, it is not strange; I rode over and back with young Winchell, and if what I hear of him is true, he would not be expected to give me the religious news of the community. Yet, now I do

remember that he did say something about my going out to hold a service in the schoolhouse; but that was just before I went away for my vacation and I have not thought of it since I came back. I have been intending to call upon Mrs. Loring, and I suppose it might be well to call on that Loomis family."

Now we must be fair to Mr. Prentice. His field was large and his duties arduous. He had in years gone by given considerable attention to the cultivating of that part of his field that lay within the boundaries of the Boynton Neighborhood, but the harvest had not been forthcoming, and his time and thought had been taken up with other and, as it seemed to him, more profitable work. The plan of Mr. Boynton had not taken hold of his sympathies or his judgment; on the contrary, it had appeared utterly impracticable. Then he had been ill and was even now but slowly regaining strength, all of which will excuse him in a great measure for not knowing what was going on in this distant part of his parish. And, after all, it must be said of this pastor that he was more given to spending his time in his study, writing sermons that were really remarkable, than to pastoral work.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE ENEMY MOVED TOO LATE.

IT had come to be a common occurrence for Karl Winchell to spend an evening with the Boyntons, and it seemed quite a matter of course that he should be Louise Harper's escort at all the social events within their circle. One evening Louise was speaking of the change in Mr. Loomis.

"I own it is marvelous," said Karl, "and it has brought me into an embarrassing position."

"How is that?"

"I have always considered a promise made to myself as binding as one made to another person. I never could understand why I should prove false to Karl Winchell sooner than to any one else. Several weeks ago I was foolish enough to promise myself that if Chad Loomis should come under the power of the gospel and it should make a new man of him, I would throw my doubts to the winds and acknowledge the truth and power of the Christian religion. And now the thing,

than which I thought nothing was more unlikely, has come to pass."

"Well?"

"I am not quite ready to fulfill my pledge; yet I am ashamed to break my word."

"But why are you not ready?" persisted Louise.

"There are some things which I cannot reconcile; some things which I cannot understand."

"But you do not place yourself in a position to understand. 'The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him,' and 'if any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine.' One cannot expect to have things made plain unless he will comply with the conditions."

"Do you find the declarations you have just made in the Bible?" he asked, adding, "You must excuse my ignorance, but I have not happened as yet to come across the passages."

Louise gave him the references, and as he did not seem inclined to pursue the topic the conversation drifted to other subjects. As he was leaving he remarked:—

"There is a matter which I think I should put into your hands. When I was taking Mr. Prentice home after the funeral services he spoke

about having a meeting in the schoolhouse. He said the attempt had heretofore proved a failure, but it might be worth while to try once more. I told him I thought we could promise an audience if he would come out occasionally. He went away for his vacation immediately after that, but he has returned, and yesterday I met him as I was in the village, and he said he could come out soon. It seemed rather queer business for me to be engaged in, but I knew you would carry it through."

"But why should n't you carry it through yourself, if you think it would be a good thing? You have influence here, and it would give the matter a sort of prestige to have some one more influential than a young woman, and she almost a stranger, taking the lead."

Karl laughed to hide his embarrassment.

"Do you not understand that my influence is not of the sort to give a good send-off to a religious meeting?"

"Then, if I were in your place, I would change the trend of my influence," said Louise earnestly.

"Perhaps I may come to see that I ought to make an effort in that direction," he replied gravely; "but I am not ready to take the respon-

sibility of this movement. I promise you, however, that I will attend the meetings if they are held, and I will do what I can to help you, in a quiet way, of course."

"One of old 'came to Jesus by night,'" said Louise, smiling.

"And afterwards, when he had learned more of the truth, he became bolder, did he not? Now about this matter," he continued; "I do not think it would be wise for me to interview Mr. Henderson in regard to the use of the schoolhouse for Mr. Prentice's meetings. You are in favor with him, partly because his children are fond of you, and I think you would succeed where any one else would fail."

So Louise Harper undertook the errand.

"You will not find it easy sailing," remarked her brother-in-law when she told him. "Henderson is one of the worst infidels of the set, and I am afraid he will not let you have the school building."

"My dear brother, 'afraid' is a good word in its place. David had a way of using it which I recommend to you: 'What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee.'" This speech was accompanied by an arch smile, which took away any suspicion of intended rebuke.

She interviewed Mr. Henderson at once. She found him very gracious, and when she made known her errand he granted her request without protest. Later one of his own set asked with a little irritation : —

“Why did you yield the point?”

“Because, for some private reasons, I wish to hold my position in the district, and I understand perfectly well that to give in to her is the only way I can gain my point. She would have a new man in office at the next election in spite of us.”

“I don’t see why a man of your influence should fear a young woman like Miss Harper. I don’t see what she could do to hurt you,” said the other.

“Do? Why, man, that girl has influence in the district! The women and children all worship her, and if she took a notion to get the women voters out to school meeting, she could use our side up pretty completely. But I do not suppose we need care about the meetings. It has been tried before and proved a failure. Religion don’t seem to get much of a foothold here.”

“I don’t know about that. They do say that Loomis has gone over to that side, and it looks

to me as though Karl Winchell had followed suit. But I reckon we can fix things so as to give the parson a warm welcome. You'll be on hand?"

"Yes; but we must move cautiously and not lay ourselves open to a legal action on the charge of disturbing a religious assembly."

"Who said anything about making a disturbance? You must not let your imagination run away with you;" and the man walked off with a chuckling laugh, which rather disturbed the chief executive of the district, who looked after him with an anxious expression, saying half-aloud: "He'll make a mess of it!"

In making arrangements for this proposed service they had thought best to vary the original plan. A double service was decided upon to be held Sunday afternoon. All the members of the Home Classes, with others, if they chose to be present, were asked to meet at three o'clock for a review of the work gone over during the past three months; then, later, there was to be a sermon. The chill of the October day rendered a fire in the large old-fashioned box stove a necessity. It was during the brief interval between the divisions of the service, while the people were coming in, that Karl Winchell replenished

the fire, picking up for the purpose a stick of wood that lay on the floor by the stove. A few moments later, just as the exercises were well begun, the fumes of sulphur filling the room made it impossible to proceed. As the people began to go out to save themselves from suffocation, Karl, taking in the situation and the cause, sprang to the front, and mounting a chair said in a ringing voice :—

“Friends, it is but a few steps to our house. My mother and I will welcome you, and we will continue this service there. All who know how to behave with decency will please go at once.”

“You seem to be rather cross about a thing you did yourself,” said a loaferish-looking man.

“What do you mean?”

“Why, you are the only one who touched the stove.”

“True, I put in the wood, but I did not plug up a pound of sulphur in it to please the devil,” said Karl with indignation. “I tell you what it is, some of you have overshot the mark this time. Christian services are going to be held here regularly, and in peace, or some of you will find yourselves in trouble.”

"Really, Winchell, I did not think you would go back on your set."

"I have n't gone back on anybody or anything, excepting my own past life. That I hope I have left behind."

Louise Harper was one of the few people who overheard these remarks, which were made as they were crossing the street to the Winchell mansion. Turning to her, he said in a lower tone than he had been using:—

"This is not exactly the way I expected to tell you that I have joined in the shout, 'The Lord, he is God!'"

There was no chance for more words just then, but he caught her glad, expressive look as he hurried forward to welcome the crowd. In less time than could reasonably have been expected improvised accommodations were arranged, the large rooms opening into each other making a good audience room. The sermon was preached, a hymn of praise sung, and a prayer offered. Before the people were dismissed, Karl stepped to Mr. Prentice's side and asked permission to say a word.

"I wish to make an announcement," he began. "Next Sunday afternoon there will be a meeting

in the schoolhouse. I feel confident that we will not be disturbed again. I am certain that I can lay my hand upon the instigators, if not the perpetrators, of the dastardly deed that drove us out to-day, and I give fair warning that in case we are again disturbed trouble will follow."

"I did not suppose a grown-up man would be such an idiot," said Mr. Henderson, angrily addressing the neighbor with whom he held the conversation already given.

"What do you mean?"

"You know well enough what I mean — that rascally disturbance."

"I do not think any grown-up man did it," responded the other. "It was without doubt the work of some of the boys; you know boys will have their fun."

"It may have been done by boys, but some one put them up to it."

"Well, I did say we did n't want any preaching out here, and if the boys were bright enough to take the hint, why should you object?"

"I object because we have lost ground by it. We make nothing by this sort of thing, and you ought to know it."

"The fact is, we have moved too late. When

that girl went around with her pledges, getting women and children to promise to study the Bible, was when the mischief was done. We thought so long as the men held aloof it would not amount to anything. But the thin edge of a wedge was slipped in just then."

"I suspect you are right," replied Mr. Henderson.

These men knew so little of the printed Word that they did not know they were expressing one of its truths. "The entrance of thy words giveth light."

## CHAPTER XVI.

### AT THE LUMBER CAMP.

I AM planning to go over to the camp to-morrow," said Mr. Winchell one forenoon, speaking to Miss Harper, who had come to the door of her schoolroom in response to his rap. "As it will be Saturday, what do you say to our making up a party to drive over and have an Indian summer picnic?"

"I say it would be delightful!" was the response.

"We might ask Miss Lee to chaperon the party and take Rena Colburn and Estelle Halstead, who are becoming inseparable; and with John Halstead we would make six. How would that do? Mother will provide the luncheon—indeed, I think she and Maggie have everything well under way already."

As he was turning away after they had arranged the hour of starting he stopped to say: "Mother told me to tell you to be sure to wear something warm and to take plenty of extra wraps. It is sometimes a chilling ride over the hills."

Karl Winchell had extensive lumber interests, owning a large tract of wild woodland about fifteen miles from the Boynton Neighborhood. Five or six families lived in a cluster of small cabins on the edge of the forest, while a number of unmarried workmen found a home in a boarding house. The little settlement was known as Winchell's Camp. As yet no saloon had invaded the place, the nearest one being fourteen miles distant. Karl, though up to this time not a radical temperance man, understood that total abstinence in his workmen meant better work, better discipline, security of property, and more comforts in the homes; so he made it a rule to employ only total abstainers from intoxicants, and the men understood that to bring liquor into the camp meant dismissal from his employ. So, though the men were rough and uneducated, irreligious and profane, the camp was free from the curse of drunkenness.

It was a lovely Indian summer day.

"Cousin Melinda," said Rena Colburn as they were planning the night before for the excursion, "I had a peep the other day at a lovely scarlet shawl in that chest you were overhauling; will you take it along to-morrow?"

"That scarlet shawl! Why, child, there is not much warmth to that!"

"I don't want it for warmth, but just because it will be a bit of bright color to have along. The rain and wind the other night spoiled all the beautiful autumn foliage and the landscape is very drear. I suppose we shall pass a few houses and meet a few people, and I want to brighten up the world for them."

"What a child! You seem to be growing philanthropic!"

"You mustn't think the idea is original. I remember reading somewhere that N. P. Willis suggested the same thing in a book he wrote about Trenton Falls, and I think it a nice thought."

So it came about that Rena Colburn, on the back seat of the open carriage, with the scarlet shawl wound about her shoulders in vivid contrast with her dark hair and eyes, was a picture of girlish beauty which her companions, at least, enjoyed. Karl seemed to have had the same thought of brightening the gloom of late November, for he had selected from the stock in the carriage house the brightest robes, and red streamers were flying from the horses' heads and

from the whipstalk. The roads were not of the best, but with an early start ten o'clock found them at Winchell Camp.

Only a few of the men were at work. Most of them had just come into camp and were busy getting their cabins in order for winter. While Karl went about attending to various matters, John and the girls were making things ready for dinner. The day proved to be sunny, and Miss Lee was made comfortable with the carriage cushions and blankets, of which there was an abundance. John had laughed that morning at Karl's preparations for the trip, but he found that the leader of this expedition knew what he was about. Some heavy canvas, which was stowed away under the seats of the carriage, when suspended from two trees made a shelter from the keen wind. As Karl went into the woods with a gang of men he said:—

“We can make the coffee at Mrs. McCreary's, but it will be well to have a fire for comfort and to ensure safety from the dampness.”

So John laid up dry twigs against a stump for a backlog and soon had a glowing fire. While they waited for Karl's return the other young people wandered about the camp, making friends

of the children and chatting with some of the older people.

"How do you spend your evenings?" asked Louise of one of the men.

"Well, we don't have very long evenings to get rid of," said the man. "You see, miss, we get out into the woods at daylight and after working all day, sometimes with a cold dinner, we come in at dark and have a hot supper, then we smoke awhile, and by that time we are ready to crawl away to bed. But sometimes of course we sit around and tell yarns or play cards. If the boss warn't so mighty particular about liquor, I suppose we would hang around a saloon and drink whiskey."

"What do you do Sundays?"

"Oh, Sundays are the hardest days of all! We lie abed later and have breakfast later. Once in a while some of us go to town Saturday night and stay over until Sunday night, but when snow comes it ain't so easy to walk fourteen miles and back; so we mostly hang around and play checkers and cards."

"It must be a dreary life," said Louise. "Cannot the men read?"

"Most of us can, but you see we don't have a

very big library. To be sure the boss sends up papers sometimes, and he told me when he hired me this fall that he was going to do better by us this year; said he'd put in a weekly newspaper and some books."

"I suppose," said Louise, "that the women and children do not get to town very often."

"I should suppose not! They mostly come in here in November and stay until April without seeing anybody from outside the woods! It's a lonesome life for the women folks!"

"I should think so. There ought to be something contrived to give them pleasure. I wonder how many out here would join a circle—do you suppose anybody would like to belong to something?"

"Do you mean a church?" asked the man. "'Cause if you do, it would n't be any sort of a go out here. The most of us is infidels and we don't take no stock in that sort of thing."

"Oh, I don't mean a church—but you see over in our neighborhood we are sometimes almost as badly off as you are out here. The roads are bad in the spring and fall and we cannot get to church, so we all took a pledge to study up a portion of the Bible every Sunday, and do you

know it makes Sunday a great deal pleasanter to have something to do? It helps the children — keeps them from getting lonesome.”

“There’s something in that,” returned the man. “Now here’s my young ones; they get dreadful lonesome. If you’ve got any ideas that will help to make them contented, I’d be glad to have you introduce them.”

Rena came to say that dinner was ready, and, with a promise to talk with the children later, Louise joined the others.

Mrs. Winchell was noted for her culinary skill, and she had not spared herself in preparing for this feast. Such bread — slices so thin and spread with golden butter; cold roast turkey with cranberry jelly, tongue and pickles, and slices of pink and white ham, cakes and doughnuts, and all so carefully and daintily packed — how they enjoyed everything!

While they were at dinner, Louise said: “I think we ought to try for a Home Class out here.”

Karl laughingly said: “I believe you’d be ready to start a Home Class at the North Pole!”

“I think I should if there were human beings up there that I could get at. I have been talking

with Mr. Riley out there, and he thinks it would be a good thing for the women and children."

"I suppose you mean old Tim? I wonder if he was ever called Mr. Riley before!" laughed John.

"But he is the rankest kind of an infidel," said Miss Lee; "and he used to be a drinking man until Karl took him in hand. I do not believe you'll get him into it."

"Well, maybe not; but I am going to canvass the community! Rena, will you come with me after we pack up?"

And sure enough, they made a house-to-house or rather a cabin-to-cabin canvass, and with the result of pledging five women and eight men to regular weekly study of God's Word.

One young fellow brushed his hand across his eyes as he said: "I promised my mother when I left home that I would read the Bible and she put one in my satchel, but I have not kept the promise very well. I am glad you have told us about this plan, and my mother will be glad when she hears of it."

Another man, older by many years, said: "Miss, I don't believe in the Bible at all, but one can't refuse the request of a nice young lady, so I'll promise just for your sake."

Still another would promise because "the children took to the notion," and others "because the boss belonged"; and thus with varying motives on the part of the members the Winchell Camp Home Department was organized.

"I will send you the books and cards," promised Louise, adding, "And I shall expect that some one will write to me as often as once a month to report how you are getting along, and how the plan works here. You might have a secretary to keep a sort of record and to write to me."

"That's so! Charlie here writes a fair hand; he'll do for secretary! My! we are getting scholarly!"

"Have you any idea that those men will keep their pledges?" asked John Halstead as they were driving homeward.

"Certainly I have. There was no occasion for them to make the promises unless they meant to carry them out. Besides, they do not know what to do with the long Sundays. There are several quite intelligent men and women who are really glad to have a plan of study. I am sure that we shall hear of the success of the scheme at Winchell Camp."

"Miss Harper, your faith in this thing and in

the possibilities of the plan is to me simply wonderful. You seem to expect people to fall right in with your wishes in the matter."

"It is not anything to wonder over," replied Louise. "The secret is just here: I am interested in the work, for I believe it is the Lord's work; and my great interest in it makes me very much in earnest, and my earnestness seems to communicate itself to the people and gives me an influence over them. I have been thrown in contact with a great many sorrowful, lonely people, and have found that the best way to help them is to give them something new to think about. I could tell you many and many a story of transformations in the life and in the thoughts and aims of people who have taken up this plan of study."

"I think we have an illustration of that right in my own home," said Karl. "Grandmother is a different woman nowadays. She was so unreconciled to her growing helplessness because of her blindness, but lately she is quite cheerful, and mother has almost forgotten that *she* is supposed to be an invalid."

Then a silence fell upon them. Perhaps the young men were thinking of transformations nearer home.

## CHAPTER XVII.

“AND NOW, LOUISE !”

MEANTIME the sale of the little house and lot in the hollow had taken place and John Halstead had become the owner as he had planned.

“When do you expect Mrs. Brown to vacate the premises ?”

Mr. Halstead asked the question one day as the family were at dinner.

“Not at present ; I told her she could stay. I shall not do anything with the place this year and perhaps not at all — at least not in the way I intended. I have looked the whole matter over very carefully and I find the outlay would be rather greater than I care to put into such an enterprise.”

Frank had so far recovered as to be allowed to sit up in a chair and to be brought into the dining room. As John finished the explanation the boy turned towards Estelle with a significant look and received in response a quick little nod. No one

noticed the little interchange of understanding, and Mr. Halstead was saying in reply to John, —

"Seems to me that is a sudden change of plans, is n't it?"

He was really very much surprised and not a little disappointed. He had considerable confidence in his son's business talent, but it appeared to him that John was making a mistake in not pushing the talked-of enterprise. However, he seldom presumed to give advice and generally allowed his son to manage his own affairs without interference. To his last remark John replied:—

"It is a change, though not a very sudden one. The truth is, my plans and purposes about several things have changed or become modified."

The father looked keenly into the face of his son as if to read there an explanation of what evidently puzzled him and said:—

"John, I hope you are not going to turn into a shifting, unstable sort of a man."

"I do not think you need fear that. Still, if a fellow finds he has mistaken the road, it would hardly be wise to keep on and refuse to change his course for fear of being considered fickle-minded or inconsistent. There is a sort of pig-headedness that often passes for something better;"

and John excused himself from the table, laughing a little at his father's evident bewilderment. "Don't worry, father; I have no doubt about the place being a profitable investment in the end."

Estelle drew Frank's chair back into the sitting room, and as soon as they were out of hearing he exclaimed:—

"Say, Estelle, did you think that perhaps John meant that in order to carry out his plans he would have to 'sell himself to do evil,' and that is the outlay which he does not think it wise to make?"

"Yes, I thought of that. John certainly acted very queer that Sunday, and a good many times since I have thought he was somehow different."

"Well, I am glad he is going to let Mrs. Brown stay. I have thought a lot about it ever since we read about Naboth, and I hated to have John buy the place; but this makes it all right."

If, as Estelle said, John was "somehow different," the change in him showed itself in little things. He did not talk so much about money; he never spoke in commendation of any one's driving a sharp bargain; he did not seem so anxious to get hold of the best end every time; he went about among the neighbors more. There

appeared to be a sort of friendship growing up between him and Mr. Winchell, and frequently he came home with one or two books from calling on Karl.

If Estelle had thought of it, she would have noticed that nowadays she seldom saw John without a coat; but one thing which she had noticed was that he always had time to do any little favor that she or Frank might ask. A magazine or two found their way into the house and another newspaper was taken. He had even spoken once or twice about Frank's going to school when he was well again. When they began to hold meetings in the schoolhouse, he harnessed his gentlest horse and drove down to the corners with Frank; and though he had not regularly joined the circle, he often went over the lesson with his sister and brother. Yes, John had changed; there was no doubt about that.

It was the week before Thanksgiving. A little company of young people had happened to meet at the Boyntons'. Karl Winchell, John Halstead, and Estelle with two or three others were there. They had discussed the doings of the social world so far as they were interested, talked over the last Sunday's sermon and commented upon the growing

interest in the meetings. When Mr. Winchell came in he remarked that he had only stopped for a few moments until Mike should call for him with the carriage, as he was going to the station to meet some friends who were expected by the ten o'clock train. Hearing the sound of wheels and Mike's "Whoa!" he rose to go.

"Miss Harper," he said, "the friends who are coming are Mrs. Armstrong and her daughter, of whom you have heard me speak. My mother wishes me to say that she hopes you and Mrs. Boynton will call soon, and I want to emphasize the suggestion. Miss Armstrong is a very old and dear friend of mine; we were brought up to consider ourselves dear friends because our fathers were closely united. I want you to know her."

Turning to John Halstead he added: "John, you must be sure to call; you remember Miss Armstrong? She was here last year and made one of our lake party. Oh, yes! I recall now the fact that you have reason to remember her. You got a wetting on her account, didn't you? I had almost forgotten that little adventure you two had. Of course you will come and see her."

What was the matter with John? Generally he was not wanting in assurance, but at this moment he flushed, then grew pale and stammered out a response which no one understood, and Karl, pitying his embarrassment, repeated his invitation in a general way to all present and hurried away.

"Miss Armstrong is lovely," said Estelle when Karl had gone, and rattling on with a girl's freedom she added: —

"They say Karl is engaged to her, though there is a report that she refused to marry him because he was an infidel. Maybe things will be different now."

Louise was so intent upon watching the effect of Estelle's talk upon her brother that she almost forgot to think what it might mean to her.

John was evidently annoyed and said almost sharply: "Estelle, don't talk neighborhood gossip!"

Meantime Karl was driving rapidly towards the railway station, his mind full of questionings and conjectures.

"Whatever in the world came over John? I never before knew him to act like a bashful school-boy. Can he be afraid of Miss Harper? or — whew! I wonder if that can be. Well, in such a case it

is possible that matters may adjust themselves satisfactorily. I am sure I hope so ! The dear old colonel and his friend tried their hand at fixing things ; but I have about come to the conclusion that the less one tries to manage things in this world after he is out of it, the better for those who are in it. God helping me, I will do my duty as I go along, even to carrying out the plans of my father and Helen's father, if she wishes it. That question must be settled. I suppose it will naturally come up for settlement while she is here this time."

A week later. It was a cheerless evening. November winds howled and now and then dashes of rain sounded upon the windows. Mrs. Boynton had gone early to bed with a nervous headache, and her husband was trying to charm away the pain and nervousness by reading to her in the peculiarly melodious voice for which he was noted. Louise Harper was in a singularly restless mood. She was not in the habit of indulging in such moods and they ill-became her.

She had called upon Miss Armstrong and the call had been returned ; she was forced to confess that Karl's dear friend was a singularly attractive

girl. "Not particularly intellectual," she told her sister, "but very bright and with a sunny face." Excepting the afternoon when he called with his guest, Karl had not been at the house since the visitors came. That was not strange; of course his guest should have his time and attention; but she missed something that had made life very pleasant for a time back. It had been a hard day in school and several things were vexing her, and altogether her thoughts were almost as gloomy as the weather. She told herself it was all on account of the weather that she felt so out of tune, and at length she determined to throw off the gloom and settled herself with a book before the open fire. Just then the bell rang. Norah was away spending the night, and Louise went to the door herself. It was Mr. Winchell in rubber coat and with dripping umbrella.

"You were not looking for a visitor to-night? Well, it is a bad night, but I wanted to see you particularly, so I came. Are you not a bit glad?" His voice had a jubilant ring and she said to herself:—

"He has come to tell me of his engagement!" The absurdity of a young man leaving his betrothed and walking half a mile in a drizzling.

rain for the purpose of telling another young woman of his happiness did not occur to her at that moment, though she laughed over the thought later. To his question she replied in a somewhat constrained tone :—

“Mr. Winchell is always a welcome visitor, and I am sure he is very kind to take the trouble to visit us in such a storm.”

He had quickly divested himself of his overcoat and shaken out his umbrella and was ready to follow her into the parlor. He began at once :—

“I have something to tell you which I am in haste to get done with. You have no doubt heard something, through the neighborhood talk, relative to Miss Armstrong and myself.” Then he told her of the friendship between their fathers and of the wish they had expressed concerning the future of their children. Continuing, he said : “While Helen and I both felt that we were perfectly free, yet we also seemed in a sense bound not to marry any one else until Helen was twenty-one. Yesterday was her birthday, and this afternoon we had a plain talk. Helen informed me that she could not think of marrying me under any circumstances. She argues that her father and mine wanted most of all to plan for our happiness, and

if we would be happier not to marry, it would have been their wish to have it so. She says she loves me like a sister. Her manner of expressing her sense of the want of harmony in our tastes is characteristic. She says it would kill her to spend her life in a house where half the rooms were lined with books. I cannot tell you everything we said, but it is all settled and our two mothers agree that it is best as it is. We are the dearest friends in the world, and there we stop. Just as I came away, I met John Halstead at the gate door and I could not help saying, 'Go ahead, old fellow — the way is clear and you are all right!' And now, Louise!"

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### OLD JOE'S BOTTLES SACRIFICED.

ROB, would n't you like to go to church with us some Sunday?"

"I dunno. What is church like?"

"Were you never at church?" asked Miss Harper in a little surprise.

"No, only once, a long time ago when I was a little feller. Ma took Fan and me one Christmas. My! it was all lighted up, and girls, in white dresses, and boys spoke pieces, and then Santa Claus came out 'n a chimbly — 't wa' n't a real chimbly, I guess — and he give everybody bags of candy! 'T was real nice. I liked it; so did Fan; and ma said she guessed we orter go to church every Sunday. But we never had no clothes to wear, and I couldn't go with you no way, 'cause I hain't got nothing decent to wear. I wants to go to school awful, but I don't s'pose dad will get me any clothes so I can go. If he would just let me burn up them bottles!"

Little did Rob dream in how hot a fire the bottles were to be burned !

It was the custom of the men of the neighborhood who gave employment to old Joe to avoid paying him money for the little jobs he could be prevailed upon to do, it being well understood that he would spend his money for liquor. Whenever he could be persuaded to take his pay in provisions his neighbors were more than willing to give overflowing measure. He had been employed by Karl Winchell for a day or two, and with that disregard for the truth which is characteristic of the man who suffers from alcoholism he represented to Karl that he wanted money to "buy tea and things" for his wife, who, he said, "was pining for her tea and had been 'out' for a few days." So Karl was persuaded to give him the money. When he saw the gleam in old Joe's eyes at the success of his plea he was sorry that he had yielded, but it was then too late to remedy the matter. Old Joe bought a pail of cider of a neighbor, which, however, failed to satisfy him and early the next morning he called Rob up, saying, —

"Here, you young rascal, get out of that and take this bottle and run to the village and get it filled ; and you may get an ounce of tea. I am

that used up with working in that ditch that I can't move until I get something to limber me up. So hurry up your lazy bones!"

Rob had settled this question several days before. Thanks to the contriving of Miss Harper he had been furnished with a respectable outfit and was able to attend school. There had been some talk of signing temperance pledges. Rob wanted to sign, but Miss Harper said she did not like to have the children sign without their parents' consent, and Rob's father had refused. But Rob said: "Miss Harper, it does n't make a bit of difference whether I sign it or not — I have signed it in my heart, and I shall keep it all the same."

"But what will you do when your father tells you to go and get whiskey for him?" asked Freddy Loomis.

"I won't go unless he makes me! I think I won't go if he kills me!" said the boy, his resolution growing stronger.

"Just you wait until he threatens you right lively!" said one of the boys tauntingly. "Your principles will melt away pretty quick!"

"You'll see!" said Rob, turning away with a shudder, for he knew something of his father's cruelty.

When he was so peremptorily ordered to get up and go after whiskey, he dressed himself quickly and getting his hat he said:—

“Dad, I’ll go and get the tea, but I can’t get whiskey!”

“Can’t! I’ll see if you can’t. A quart of whiskey don’t weigh more’n a ton! I guess you’ll manage to bring it.”

The boy was very pale, but he did not stir. The man was growing angry. “Here, you young rascal!” he exclaimed, “take the bottle and the money and don’t be gone all day.”

There was no movement on the part of the boy, and the man saw the look of determination, and somehow he realized that there would be no yielding, and, angered at the thought, he hurled the bottle at Rob’s head. The child fell, the blood gushing from the wound. Still the enraged father was not satisfied with his work, and, striding across the room, kicked him brutally. But the mother, roused to frenzy at the sight of her bleeding child, exerted all her strength, and before old Joe knew what she was about he found himself outside the door, with the door closed and barred. He spent his passion in kicks and blows upon the door, while the frantic woman,

who in spite of her seeming hardness had a mother's love for her children, laid Robbie upon the poor heap of rags that was called a bed, and putting one of the children out of a window upon the other side of the house, told her to run by a circuitous route for the neighbors.

"Tell them he will kill us all if they do not come soon," she urged.

When Mr. Carter and Mr. Loomis arrived the infuriated man was battering in the door with an old ax.

"I'll teach 'em to bar a man out of his own house!" he muttered; then shouted at the top of his voice: "A man's house is his castle!"

"Why, Joe, what is the matter?" asked Mr. Loomis, coming up and laying his hand upon the arm that was about to wield a blow. The touch was light, but Mr. Loomis said afterwards: "I was ready for a grip, if necessary."

"Matter! You'd say something was the matter if your wife shut the door on you."

"Well, yes, I should say something was the matter with me," said Mr. Loomis, laughing a little. "Now hold on, Joe, and let's find out what the trouble is. We will help you out of this if you'll be easy."

"Will you, sure? Will you help me batter this door down? There's an old beetle in the shed around there."

"Is there? Well, give the ax to Carter and show me where the beetle is."

Without a word the old man, rather to Mr. Loomis' surprise, gave up the ax and started to go around the house, but Mr. Loomis was not quite ready.

"Hold on!" he said; "maybe they will open the door to me. See here, Wilson, if I get that door open, will you behave yourself?"

"I! I have been behaving; but that boy of mine refused to obey me, and I must discipline him. Solomon says: 'Spare the rod and spoil the child.' I can't be guilty of spoiling my child!"

The door flew open and Mrs. Wilson appeared, wringing her hands.

"It is no matter now. I don't care if he kills all of us! Rob is dead! he is dead!"

That shriek seemed to act like an electric shock upon the benumbed brain of old Joe.

"Who is dead? Not Rob!" and he rushed into the house. The scene for a few moments cannot be described.

"My boy is n't dead!" screamed the old man. Then: "Yes, he is! I killed him!"

Mr. Loomis again laid his hand upon the excited man and said in a resolute tone: "Joe, be quiet. I do not think Rob is dead; but he will die unless we do something for him. Carter, go and send some one on your fastest horse for a doctor, and then bring some women — your wife and Mrs. Boynton, perhaps."

To one who had known Chad Loomis all his life it would have been a puzzle to account for the change which had come over him, and indeed, when the excitement of that morning was over, Mr. Carter said: —

"Well, Chad blossomed out in new colors this morning. He gave orders right and left as though he had been used to ordering all his life, and I declare, I just wonder where the old shiftless, shambling Chad Loomis has gone to."

Sooner than they could have expected the doctor came. The boy was still unconscious, in spite of all their attempts to revive him. At last after a weary waiting the physician's efforts were successful, and the boy opened his eyes and looked about him.

"Is it on?" he asked in a whisper so faint as

to be inaudible to all except the doctor, who was bending over him.

"I think so, my boy," replied the physician assuringly.

"Are you sure? Has father put the bottle on the altar?" Then the eyes closed again and Dr. Clarke, turning away, said:—

"I should say he had put you on, my poor boy!"

Presently Rob revived and was able to swallow the medicine which the doctor administered; and in response to Mrs. Boynton's questioning eyes, Dr. Clarke said: "Yes, I think he will live; that is, if anybody can live in such a hole as this!"

"Do you think he can be moved?"

"Not just yet; perhaps later. If he seems likely to pull through, we can move him if there is any place to move him to."

That morning began a long, weary time of watching—a long weary time of suffering. But once more in the history of men was exemplified the truth of David's song of deliverance: "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

Strange to say, the bottle was not broken in the assault, and while they were all busy with Rob old Joe picked it up and went out into the street.

"Dad's gone after the whiskey himself," whispered one of the children, and so it seemed; but as he was passing the schoolhouse Miss Harper came to the door and called him.

"How is Robbie just now?" she asked kindly.

"O Miss Harper! I don't know. The doctor says he may live, but I don't believe it. He will die, and I'll know that I killed him. O Miss Harper, what shall I do?"

"The first thing — come down to the house and I will get you a cup of coffee."

Stepping back into the schoolroom she said: "Estelle and Lillian, I think you can manage the school for an hour or so. The children will be very good, I am sure, while I go back to the house to do something for Robbie's father — will you not?"

Every hand went up, and quickly putting on her wraps Louise joined the bewildered man who was waiting outside. As if under a spell he followed her into the Boynton kitchen, where she speedily prepared a cup of steaming coffee which he eagerly swallowed.

Then Louise told him about Robbie's altar where he had sacrificed his bad habits, and how the boy was praying that his father might be led

to burn his bottle. Old Joe listened eagerly, asking many questions, and when he left the house he took the road leading to the pasture, where Louise had told him he would find the pile of stones which Rob called his altar.

When after a day or two he was allowed to speak to the suffering boy he said in a trembling voice : —

“ Rob, my boy, I have something to tell you. I left my bottle, my pipe and tobacco down in the pasture on your altar. I'm done with them forever ! ”

“ O dad ! do you mean it ? I am so happy ! ”

“ And now, Rob, can you forgive your miserable old dad ? ”

But why try to describe the touching scene too sacred for witnesses ? From that hour there was a difference in Joe Wilson. He was no longer “ Old Joe.” Presently people began to call him Mr. Wilson, and even to realize that he was quite a youngish man and a very good-looking man too.

“ That boy ought to be moved into more comfortable quarters,” said Dr. Clarke one day a week or two after the accident. “ He is likely to have to stay in bed for many weeks, perhaps for

months. If there were a hospital that he could be put into, but " —

"We will see what can be done," said Mrs. Winchell. "I will talk with my son, and perhaps some plan can be devised for making the child more comfortable."

Karl's plan, which was the one adopted, was for the whole family to move into a vacant tenement house on the Winchell farm.

"A few repairs, with fresh paper on the walls and a coat of whitewash on the ceilings, will make quite a respectable place of it," said Karl in consultation with his mother and two or three other women of the neighborhood. "I will drive into town and get the paper this afternoon, if some of you can help about putting it on and fixing up things generally. I have an idea that if we can lift the family right out of that filth and start them all right, they may keep themselves halfway decent."

Miss Lee, Rena, Louise, and Estelle undertook to help carry out Karl's scheme. The house was small, but a good-sized living room and pantry with two bedrooms on the ground floor seemed very convenient. Robbie was to have the larger of the two sleeping rooms which had a window

looking down the street towards the schoolhouse, and so situated that he could see the scholars going in and coming out. Fresh paper on the wall, a coat of paint which John Halstead put on as his share of the work, a soft and bright rug of home manufacture, Miss Lee's gift, two or three flowering plants in the window, a table screwed to the side of the cot to turn on a pivot, Karl's contrivance, and near the door, in an improvised cupboard, Rena's present to Rob — a plate, cup and saucer, knife and fork, soup bowl, sugar and milk mugs, with pepper and salt boxes — made the room both comfortable and attractive. Karl's grandmother had begged the privilege of providing the cot and its furnishings. Whatever the kind neighbors could think of was done for the comfort of the sufferer. The furniture in the other parts of the house was scanty, for everything in the old house was left behind with the old life.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### NEWS FROM WINCHELL CAMP.

FOR a time Rob was too ill to be conscious when Sunday came, and as the family were not accustomed to make any difference in the way of spending the day, two or three Sundays passed without his knowledge. But when he began to notice things and to talk a little, he asked :—

“What day is it ? ”

“Friday,” replied his sister, who had been left in charge of the invalid for a little while.

“Has there been a Sunday since I have been sick ? ”

“My ! yes ; two or three of them.”

“And I did n’t study the lesson ! ”

“You could n’t, you know ; you were too sick.”

“Yes, I suppose so ; but I will be able to study by next Sunday.”

“I don’t believe they ’ll let you,” said the girl.

“Is the doctor coming again before Sunday ? ”

"Yes ; he is coming to-morrow."

"Then I shall ask him ;" and Rob closed his eyes, quite wearied with his attempt at conversation.

"Study the lesson?" said the doctor when appealed to ; "what do you mean?"

"Why, I belong to something ; I don't just remember what it is, and there's lessons. I used to go to see Miss Harper Sundays, and she explained things."

"But you can't go to visit Miss Harper just yet, my boy. By and by we shall have you well again, but you must be patient and not get notions in your head."

"Oh, I won't get notions. I do not expect to go to Miss Harper's for ever so long, but I thought maybe you'd let me have the papers and cards, though Katharine said you would n't."

"Well, you just be patient and wait another week and we'll see about it."

Another week passed, and Robbie again appealed to the doctor : "Can I have my lesson books to-morrow?"

The doctor looked at the boy and then seemed to remember.

"What is it all about? Let me see the books he wants."

Katharine brought the books and the membership card. Dr. Clarke read the card and observed the crooked, scrawling signature, and noted the little crosses and wondered what it all meant.

"This is a queer thing! Who belongs to your 'Something'?"

"Oh, Miss Harper and Mrs. Winchell and Miss Lee and a lot more. Mr. Winchell, he belongs too."

"Not Karl Winchell?"

"Yes; he is the one I mean."

"My boy, you are mistaken. Karl Winchell never made any such promises as these."

"Yes, he has; 'cause one day he met me in the road and he said: 'Well, Rob, you and I belong to the same society, did you know it?' And I told him I s'posed it was all right if Miss Harper took him in; and he said he guessed it was. Then he asked me if I knew anything about that old prophet, and I told him I guessed I did! And I told him how I had burned up a lot of things that I used to worship—swearing and lying and bad words, and such things, you know. Then he laughed and said I was n't the

only fellow that had found himself in a hot fire. I don't know what he meant, but I s'pose he had things to burn up too. I s'pose everybody has, don't you think so, doctor?"

"You are a queer chap," said the doctor, laughing. Then more to himself than to the boy he said: "I have noticed several peculiar things in this neighborhood lately; I wonder if this business can be the explanation of what has puzzled me?" Then, turning back to Rob, he added: "And so you want to study a little to-morrow? Well, if you sleep well to-night, you may have the books for half an hour to-morrow morning. Better do your studying in the morning, for the present. On the whole, it will be a good plan to have your sister here read the lesson to you, for we must take care of your eyes; we don't want a boy going about in spectacles when you do get about."

This was the way Katharine Wilson became a member of the Home Department. One by one, gathered in here and there, the list grew.

Meantime two months passed after the visit to Winchell Camp before any word came in regard to the class among the lumbermen. John Halstead and Rena Colburn were inclined to laugh

a little over the attempt to plant the Department in such unfertile soil, but to Louise Harper it was far too serious a matter. She would say: "Of one thing I am certain; something will come of it sometime. There are two promises which assure me of this. Whether I consider it as bread cast upon the waters, or as precious seed sown with weeping, it will surely bring good returns in due time."

And one day there came a letter. The address was at least legible, and that is more than can be said of some who boast of more learning and more culture than any of the men of Winchell Camp. The letter read like this:—

*Dear Miss Harper,* — You wanted to know how we got along keeping our pledge about studying the Bible Sundays. We like it first-rate. It helps to pass away the time Sundays, and sometimes we get so interested talking about the meaning of a verse and wondering if it can be true that we forget to notice when the hour is up, and study right along until dark. Mr. Tim Riley calls himself an infidel, but he keeps saying, "Boys, that young woman believes it, and you have no call to say anything against the Book as long as you are studying it on a promise made to her."

The Camp is not as rough as it used to be, and the Sundays are real quiet. Maybe you have n't heard — I wrote to the boss about it, but we could not get out because of the

big storm—a little baby died two weeks ago. One of the men made quite a nice little coffin, but the poor mother was almost wild because there was no one to pray before we lowered her child into the grave. Old Tim told her that just as soon as the roads were open he would go out and fetch a minister and have a funeral service for the dead child, but somehow that did n't seem to comfort her. Then one of the men—we always call him Jim—spoke up. He said: “Boys, I may as well say it; I belong to a church, though you would never guess it; but since we have been studying the Bible it has come home to me that I have n't been much of a Christian, and now that I have told you, I think I shall do better. Now I do know how to pray a little, and if any one of you will read some verses out of the Book, I can pray and we will have a funeral for the baby, and that will comfort the poor mother.” And, Miss Harper, we did hold a little service. I went off in the woods, where I had seen some vines growing under the snow, and we covered the plain little box all over with green vines and put in red berries that were still hanging on some bushes in the swamp.

Now I got to thinking what would we have done if you had not set us going. I don't suppose Jim would have said the prayer if he had not been set thinking beforehand about his belonging to a church and not living right. So you see we want to thank you for the comfort that prayer gave to the mother. And the father was one of the roughest men in the Camp, but he is as quiet as a lamb and stays at home and studies with his wife and the older children.

This letter is pretty long and I will only add that we all wish you could come over here again. We get puzzled

sometimes, but that only makes the study more exciting and interesting.

I forgot to tell you that we have some good singers, and we always sing the hymns that are in the books with the lessons. And I must tell you one thing more. The next Sunday after we buried the baby when we came to study Jim was a little late, and we waited a few minutes. Pretty soon he came in and before he sat down he said, and his voice was pretty husky: "Boys, you heard me pray the other day. Now I am sure there are some of you who learned to pray at your mother's knee, and here's a place in the order of exercises where it says Prayer. Don't you think it would be a good plan to go the whole figure, as they say?" Then one fellow spoke up: "It might, but you know, Jim, some of us don't believe in prayer." We talked it over a little, and then old Tim spoke up and said: "Boys, I know you mean me. Now you needn't mind me at all; prayer won't hurt me. I've stood things a sight worse, so go ahead."

Now, Miss Harper, we are not a Christian Camp, but we are better than we used to be, thanks to you.

Yours with respect,

CHARLES MORLEY.

## CHAPTER XX.

### RENA'S SACRIFICES.

MRS. WILSON'S knowledge of housekeeping was very limited, and besides the habits of years were not easy to overcome, hence, though the house had been put in perfect order for the moving in, it was only to be expected that things would settle into something like their old way of living. Yet things could never be just the same. The head of the family was radically changed; there was no more dreading his homecoming. Instead, the children were beginning to look eagerly for him when his day's work was over. As Mr. Boynton had helped Mr. Loomis, so Mr. Winchell was helping old Joe to regain his manhood and to repossess himself of his rightful name. It was a hard struggle. There were those who told him that he would die if he stopped drinking suddenly. To them he replied: "Then I must die! A fellow can't burn up a thing and keep it! Anyway I feel pretty sure that the Lord

is going to help me through. But, if I die, I won't die a drunkard ! ”

He had been to Karl with the story of stealing hams from the Winchell smokehouse ; corn from the crib ; potatoes from the field ; chickens from the hen-roost, and butter from the dairy. He said that he had argued that as Karl was rich and he was poor it was not fair, and that he had a right to a share of the good things. Now he wanted to be allowed to work for Karl and turn part of his wages in payment for the stolen property. Karl finally consented, realizing that the man would the sooner and more surely regain his self-respect by so doing. Meantime Mrs. Winchell undertook to make up the deficiency in wages to the family.

Katharine, the oldest child, was a bright girl and would have been quite pretty but for a surly expression which had become habitual. Louise said, “ It is going to take a great deal of loving to win that girl, but when she is won it will be worth the cost.”

“ Miss Lee's bread is nicer than ours,” said one of the children, when, after having enjoyed a share of a loaf which Miss Lee had sent to Robbie, they were satisfying the demands of

hunger with the sour, soggy mass of stickiness which Mrs. Wilson called bread.

"I believe I can learn to make bread myself," said Katharine. "I am going to ask Miss Lee how she does it."

The girl had a resolute nature and Rob was her idol; she would dare anything for him, and it really required some courage for this girl who had seldom crossed the threshold of a neighbor's house to go to Miss Lee, the very pink of spick-spanness, and ask to be taught how to make bread. Miss Lee's surprise was equaled only by her consternation. Teach that girl to cook! She had supposed she was willing to be used in any way that the Master saw fit to use her—but the idea of taking into her neat kitchen, into her sweet-smelling pantry, that dark-browed, slatternly girl! Yet so perfect was her self-control and so quickly did a better thought come to her that no trace of the momentary annoyance showed in word or manner.

"Why, yes, I'll teach you how to make bread. I might write down how I do it, but it would not be so good a way to learn as for you to come up here and make a batch or two yourself. I have baked to-day for Miss Colburn and myself; suppose you come to-morrow and I will let you make two

or three loaves for yourself — I mean to take home to your mother. If your mother is willing, you might come up here to-morrow evening and set the sponge and stay all night so as to do the whole of it."

Rena heard this proposition with dismay. That girl to stay all night in that house! Where would cousin Melinda put her to sleep! Rena thought of the bedrooms, the white ceilings, the tinted walls, the carpeted floors, and the beds — either hair mattresses or soft nests of feather beds, and great fluffy pillows and dainty patchwork quilts and sweet-smelling sheets, every room fit for a queen! After Katharine had gone that day Rena said: "Why, cousin Melinda, where will she sleep?"

"Well, I think in the sunshine room," said Miss Lee. "I know you think I am crazy, but, Rena, it must be that the Lord sent that child here for a purpose — even for something more than lessons in bread making, and can I put her in the woodshed chamber?"

"I should think that would be the place for her," returned Rena, unconvinced; "she is so untidy and so — dirty! There's no other word that expresses it!"

“Yes, dear, I know; but did you never hear of soap and water as an antidote for dirt?”

The next morning Rena kept herself very closely in her own room, somewhat to Miss Lee's wonderment. About two o'clock she came downstairs, her arms full of garments: “See here, cousin Melinda! Some folks pack up their old duds and send them off to missionaries. I have had a sewing society all by myself and I feel like a veritable Dorcas! Here's the result, and now if your tact, your graciousness, can prevail upon that minx to put them on, I shall be rewarded for my self-sacrifice and my pricked fingers.”

Though not a very skillful needlewoman, Rena had contrived a very comfortable and pretty outfit. It would certainly be pretty if Rena Colburn had anything to do with it.

Miss Lee's tact was equal to the task set for her, and the young girl who sat opposite Rena at the breakfast table was as neat and trim as could be desired. Under Miss Lee's direction Katharine had “set the sponge”; she had slept in the sunshine room, and rising early, again working under her kind hostess' direction, she had kneaded the dough and put it in a warm place to rise again. You understand that Miss Lee had not adopted

the new-fashioned mode of bread making but went through the old formula of setting the sponge with two risings afterwards. And her loaves, brown outside and white inside, with the delicious nutty flavor, were proof of either her plan or her skill. Later Katharine molded the loaves and attended to the baking. About noon she went home carrying the product of her labor, and a more jubilant household one does not often find.

"And did you do it all yourself?" asked Fan.  
"Do you s'pose you could do it alone?"

"I think I could, but Miss Lee says I am to go up there next Wednesday and make another batch all by myself, and if I don't have to ask too many questions about it, I can make bread at home after that!"

The second trial was a success, and good, light, sweet bread was henceforth the order in the Wilson home.

Then the girl's ambition rose to pies and cake, and so there were more lessons until Rena laughingly said that "cousin Melinda had opened a cooking school."

And not only pies and cakes but puddings and meats and vegetables came in for a share of atten-

tion until Katharine bade fair to become a famous cook.

It was about this time that Rena said one day as she sat alone with her cousin : " I think I 'll follow old Joe's example ! "

" My dear, do you not think you ought to begin to say Mr. Wilson ? "

" Well, yes ; but the man I was speaking of was old Joe. He may be Mr. Wilson now, but it is old Joe's example that I mean to follow ! " said Rena, laughing.

" Well, will you explain ? I cannot imagine what there could have been in Mr. Wilson's former life that you should think of copying. "

" Why, do you not think it rather a commendable act for him to sacrifice his bottle ? "

" Yes, but I do not understand — surely you have not a bottle to sacrifice ? "

" Not exactly ; but, cousin, do you not think there may be other sorts of intemperance than alcoholic ? "

" Certainly, but I am still in the dark. "

" Well, my bottles are all bound up in paper covers. You know that since I came here, except for the little I have studied in the Home Class, I have done little besides reading novels. Now

I am going to sacrifice them all and turn over a new leaf and read something that is worth reading."

Miss Lee looked at the girl in wonder. What a change was coming over her! The discontent had gone out of her face and there was an eager, looking-forward expression that was quite new, and certainly was more suited to the fair, young face.

"Have you lost your liking for novels?" asked the older woman.

"No, I have n't! I do like a nice story — but I am not going to indulge in them any more."

"Do you think it wrong?"

"Wrong for me; I get so lost in a story that I have no thought for anything else. That was the trouble at the high school. I always had a novel on hand, and I used to read into the nights and then of course I did not feel like study. Willard used to feel so troubled because I did not enjoy the books and magazines that he liked, but he never knew what I was reading. Mr. Van Berger brought me a great many, and I know now that they were not all good books."

"But, Rena, why make a wholesale burning? I read some novels and find them very helpful."

"Yes, but you laid the foundation of your education in good solid reading and hard study, and now you can afford to put in a little flagree work in the upper stories of your building. Mine had nothing to rest on, so I am going to sacrifice it all and begin over again. It will cost!"

It was finally decided that cousin Melinda should look over the trunkful of books and ascertain if there were any not worthless which might be of use to some one else. Two or three really valuable works were found, but these Rena confessed she had not read. "They looked dry and uninteresting," she said. Some were pleasant stories with a weak solution of moral sprinkled over the pages; others were bad, positively bad. And this was the food, mental and moral, upon which the girl had subsisted.

"What is to take the place of all this?" asked Miss Lee.

"Text-books! Miss Harper has offered to teach a Latin class after school hours, and I am going to join it. Lillian Carter and Estelle and Frank Halstead are going to study in it."

"Oh, that's it! I thought perhaps you were going to confine yourself to the study of *The Life and Letters of a Great Man*," said Miss Lee with

a twinkle in her eyes and a smile lurking about her lips.

It was only for an instant that Rena was puzzled, then she exclaimed with a merry laugh: "Now, cousin Melinda, you know very well that you enjoy Cline's letters almost as much as I do!"

"Yes, dear, I do enjoy them, and I think he is a splendid young fellow; almost as much as you do."

## CHAPTER XXI.

### SOME RESULTS.

AS winter drew near there were anxious discussions between Mr. Colburn and his son. The three months which they had expected would be the extreme limit of Rena's stay at cousin Melinda Lee's had passed, and Mr. Colburn proposed to go and bring his daughter home.

"But what will we do with her when we get her home again?" asked Willard Colburn with perplexity in his voice. "I can't see that the place is any more fit for the child than it was in the spring. It is my opinion that the best thing to do will be to send her to boarding school."

"I dread a boarding school for Rena. It seems as though a girl of her temperament would be better off with her own family."

"Yes, it would seem so, but you know how we succeeded in looking after her. And if she comes home she will naturally fall under the influence of the same set that we took her from. We have had a restful time thinking she was safe for the

summer, though the house has been pretty lonely. But I dread the winter."

Over and over they turned the subject, never coming to a decision as to what it was best to do with this girl who was at the same time their idol and their torment. It seemed that there was no way but to bring her home for a time at least, and Mr. Colburn took the journey for that purpose. He found his daughter much improved in health and quite contented and happy.

She seemed appalled at the thought of leaving cousin Melinda and pleaded for a winter among the hills. "Just to see what it is like," she said.

"And do you not see what a cozy nest this house is?" she urged. "When the coal fires are going cousin Melinda and I will be like kittens in a fur rug."

The end of the argument was that Mr. Colburn went back to the city alone.

"It is better than boarding school," he said, explaining to Willard. "The child is safe and happy, and though it is lonely without her we must get along and think of her welfare. She seems to have a very nice friend," — Willard started in alarm, but his father's next words

reassured him, — “a girl about her age ; a little younger I think ; a Halstead. As soon as I heard the name I remembered that when I used to go out to the farm in Uncle Jerry’s lifetime there was a family of that name in the neighborhood, and so I went over to Estelle’s home and found that her father was an old playfellow of those days, and that her mother is an old acquaintance too.”

So frequently and so favorably did Mr. Colburn senior speak of his visit and of people and matters in the neighborhood, that one day the younger man said : “ Well, father, you seem to have fallen in love with the place. I told you it was a charming locality, but you seem to have found more to admire than I did. I think I’ll run up and see Rena and look around a little.”

Not once only but twice during the winter Willard Colburn visited in the Boynton Neighborhood, and the following summer both father and son took a vacation and spent a week or two at Miss Lee’s. Taking a vacation was quite out of the older man’s line of thought, but much to his own surprise he was persuaded into it and found it more enjoyable than he had dreamed.

Some weeks after he returned home he said :

"Willard, I have been thinking of a plan. Rena cannot stay out there always — though if it were not for school, I would say it was not a bad plan — but she must come home this fall, and she is too young to be alone. Suppose we invite her pretty friend to spend the winter here and attend school with Rena, and try to persuade cousin Melinda Lee to come and look after the girls and enjoy a winter in the city. What do you say?"

"I say it is a good thought. Rena ought to have companions, and I have no doubt we can make it pleasant all around."

Sō it was arranged. Changes were coming to the Boynton Neighborhood. Lillian Carter was about to realize her dream of going away to school. Her mother had decided that there was no reason why their daughter should not have "as good advantages as the best of them"; and so, because a spirit of rivalry, born of envy, had taken possession of the mother's mind, Lillian was to have her wish.

But before this scattering of the young people there was a wedding. As they talked over the plans, Mr. Boynton said:—

"Sister Louise, I think you will have to wait

until I can build larger ; there'll not be room for all the Boynton Neighborhood in this house."

"Nevertheless I am going to have the people all here, and I am not going to wait for a new house either," returned Louise.

"How will you manage it? We might build platforms outside the windows and thus accommodate a few more," said Mr. Boynton teasingly.

"This is what we will do ; we will invite all our friends and have a lawn party, and we will stand under the largest maple on the grounds."

"And put on the invitations : 'If the weather be unfavorable, the ceremony will be postponed until the first fair day,' as we do with notices of picnics?"

"'No postponement on account of weather,'" said Karl, who appeared to think it was time he put in a word.

But Louise was in earnest, and it was planned as she had suggested. Some said : "Who ever heard of such a thing?" Others with a touch of superstition prophesied misfortune on account of this departure from established custom, while the most thought it such a pretty idea. Lillian Carter was reminded of a poem in one of the school readers, and quoted :—

"The groves were God's first temples. Ere man learned  
To hew the shaft and lay the architrave,  
And spread the roof above them, — ere he framed  
The lofty vault, to gather and roll back  
The sound of anthems; in the darkling wood,  
Amidst the cool and silence he knelt down,  
And offered to the Mightiest solemn thanks  
And supplication.

Ah, why

Should we, in the world's riper years, neglect  
God's ancient sanctuaries, and adore  
Only among the crowd, and under roofs  
That our frail hands have raised?"

"When I was married," said Mrs. Carter, "we had the blinds closed and the curtains all down, and had the parlor lit up as though it was evening. It made my wedding dress show off so prettily! My! it will be dreadfully trying to Miss Harper's complexion! But, my! she would never do anything like other folks, anyway. But I should think Mrs. Winchell, with all her aristocratic notions, would tell them it is n't the way folks do. But then Karl would do as Louise said, anyway. They are all just wrapped up in that girl."

"But, ma, it is the only way she could invite us all," said Lillian.

"Of course, if she is going to have everybody

there, she will need all out-of-doors to hold them. But the idea of inviting the Wilsons and the Loomises and all the rest of that set! I don't understand what has got into everybody!"

"I can tell you what it is," said Lillian; "it is a little of the spirit of the gospel. If it has n't got into my heart, I can see it in other people. Miss Harper and Karl Winchell have got a little more of it than most folks."

"Lillian Carter, what nonsense you are talking! As if religion had anything to do with the arrangements people make for a wedding. You'll find out when you get ready to be married that you'll be thinking a great deal more of your gown than of religion!"

"Maybe I will, but Miss Harper is n't that sort," persisted Lillian.

Years have passed — seven of them. If we were to follow out the history of these friends of mine during this period, I should have to take you some long and tiresome journeys into new scenes. I should have to take you to a city parish where they are awaiting the coming of their pastor-elect and his young wife? Rena Colburn a minister's wife? Ah, yes; that year spent

in the Boynton Neighborhood, then a few more years at school and college, have rounded out her character and she stands to-day a type of beautiful womanhood. It was not a very great surprise when, during his theological course, Cline Eastman came to her and asked her to be his wife. "I meant it that day when we said good-by under the old butternut at the line fence," he said.

And she replied quickly: "So did I."

And, too, I should have to take you, in what may seem a little like a prophetic vision, into a foreign field; yet it requires no great stretch of the imagination to place Lillian Carter beside one pledged to go out to Africa as a medical missionary. John Halstead, regretting that the defective education of his earlier years and the lack of literary habits and tastes made it at least unadvisable, if not impossible, that he should undertake the work of spreading the truths which had come with great power into his own life, determined to educate his young brother; and the Master seemed to reward his faith by giving to that brother the spirit of consecration in an unusual degree. And so these two are getting ready for their lifework, and what is more to be expected than that they will go out together?

Then, too, we would visit Estelle in her home in the city, and go with her to call on her Home Class students. She would take us into the Invalids' Home, where she and Rena established the work while still in school. She would introduce us to the dear old lady who listens every Sunday morning for the ringing of the church bells so that she may begin her simple, solitary service. And I do not suppose we would be very much surprised to hear the people addressing our Estelle as Mrs. Willard Colburn.

But as we began our story in the Boynton Neighborhood, so we will leave off there. We began it upon a June Sabbath, and now upon another June day Mr. and Mrs. Boynton are sitting together as they were then on the front porch, looking so little changed that we can scarcely realize that so many years have intervened. There is, however, no game of baseball going on in the valley below to disturb the peacefulness of the hour. All the players have not taken to studying the Bible, but Sabbath breaking has grown unpopular, especially since Karl Winchell said :—

“Boys, if you want a ball-ground for week-days, you can have a piece of the south meadow ; but

if your nine cannot get along without Sunday playing, then my offer does not hold good."

Upon this June day it was not only the Boyntons who drove to church in the village, but the Winchells and the Halsteads and several others fell into line. Mr. Loomis in the strength of his redeemed manhood found it easy to provide for his own house, and there is now no pleasanter or happier home in the neighborhood than that of the Loomises. Having become the owners of a horse and buggy, the family are regular churchgoers. I would like to go over in detail the story of the time when the Spirit of the Lord came into that neighborhood in power; when the schoolhouse was crowded with men and women, eager to learn the way of life; when Mr. Prentice discovered that even in that sterile soil the seed had taken root and an abundant harvest was ready for the reaping. We know how the cry of Robbie Wilson's young heart was answered; we have seen the beginning of the lifting of that family out of their degradation, which is perhaps the most marvelous thing that occurred in the Boynton Neighborhood. But were I to go through all the history of the uplift in that locality I should have to tell of hours of discouragement

when the carefully wrought out plans seemed almost a failure, and when the few workers had need of all their energized faith. But I should have also to tell how the faithful ones continued to hold high the standard of the Lord, and the results proved that :—

“Work done for God, done in the strength of God, done under the aid of the Holy Spirit, done wherever it is needed, with unfaltering faith as regards the ultimate results ; work done not in the spirit of willfulness or strife, but in gentleness ; constant and patient and persevering labor for the Master,—this it is that tells for the advancement of the Redeemer’s cause and the good of humanity in this world, and which shall at last receive the commendation so welcome—  
‘Well done.’”









